

A LION NEVER WEEPS



इगं लवतव

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TALES OF A GREAT SWAN

Ayyā Medhānandī

I pay deepest homage
honouring the memory of
my blessed spiritual teachers
my parents ~ Jay & Lea Fiksel ~

Sri Kappali Baba

Sri Gutaly Baba

Sayadaw U Pandita

& Sayadaw U Jnanapurnika

They have all gone from this realm but always remain in my heart.



Preface

In the early 1970's, I was one of those young wide-eyed seekers who travelled overland and sea to India in search of life's meaning or eager for adventures and experiences in a land teeming with the exotic. For me it was clear. When I crossed on foot from Pakistan into India, the border guards asked the purpose of my journey. '*Spiritual pilgrimage*', I told them.

Within three weeks, I met Sri Kappali Baba, an extraordinary mendicant sage and accomplished yogi of the Patanjali school of meditation. As a farmer of the kshaitriya caste in southern Uttar Pradesh during the 1940's, his mystical experiences eventually led to his discipleship with a great yogi and cohort of Mahatma Gandhi. He became a teacher not only for me, but for my parents as well.

Baba's profound wisdom, kindness and compassion endeared him to many in his region, among them royalty, government officials, scholars, farmers, engineers, mothers and school children – of different faiths. They passed through the gate of his modest temple as if drawn to a magnet.

To become his student, I would have to immerse myself in monastic austerity and learn the local dialect. I soon came to realize that he was helping me discover a reliable interior compass that was to set my feet squarely on a spiritual path for life.

That was 50 years ago. These are a few stories about my Baba: grandfather, parent, guide and blessed spiritual friend.

Nb. Sri Mata means 'Revered Mother.'

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1. MEETING A YOGI

Uttar Pradesh, India, December 1973

Dressed in heavy cotton jeans and hiking boots and laden with travel backpacks, we walked the long byways leading out of Jhansi to the main highway south. I tried to be stoic in the stifling heat, mustering the willpower to keep one foot in front of the other. It was midday, after all, and probably not the best time to be directly in the sun, weighed down, not dressed for this climate, on a long stretch of sizzling tarmac that paved the state road to Chattarpur.

We were still within the outer city limits when a ramshackle bus squealed to a halt in the shade just ahead. Someone eagerly motioned to us from the window, asking in good English, "Where are you going?"

"This way," I quipped pointing south to the road, hoping no unfriendliness was betrayed. We'd had a week's worth of explaining ourselves to curious locals.

"Will you please come on the bus?" he entreated. "It is very hot to be walking."

"We like to walk, thank you," I assured him. After our recent experiences as guests being inundated with sweetmeats, chili-laden foods, and never-ending questions not to mention scarcely a moment of privacy, the merciless heat seemed a small price to pay for a chance to walk unescorted in silence.

Our bus friend did not relent. "You must join me. Come, please be my guests."

Each time we politely declined, he rebounded, inviting us along. If only the bus would drive away and leave us in peace.

Finally, when we were out of earshot, he disembarked and ran after us shouting and even pulling on our luggage, pleading with us to get on the bus. His resolve to convince us eventually broke down all resistance and we boarded.

Our host's name was Ravindra Kaushik, Ravi for short. He was an attorney – what else! By and by, having learned our countries of origin, destination, reasons for visiting India, and all the standard questions locals ask conspicuous foreigners from the West, he made it plain that we were to be his guests and stay with him in his village.

We had no intention of agreeing to such a plan and let him know as much. "*We can't accept your kind invitation because tonight we must go to Chattarpur.*"

He refused to listen and kept on inviting us while the bus veered at high speed down the pot-holed road. Only the oppressive heat and hours of jostling lulled him to a low pitch. By late afternoon, we made a welcome stop at a roadside outdoor teashop.

Ravi wasted no time offering us to join him for a cup of tea. He then repeated his wish to take us to his village which happened to be nearby! He felt such a strong urge to bring us home, he claimed, because a saint was there performing an important ceremony. And, he said, emphatically, "*You must meet him.*"

Still, we were not to be tempted. Sitting at one of the outdoor tables in the shade, we felt refreshed just quietly sipping our cups of sweet milky tea.

Suddenly, the engine started up. We rushed to the bus door to climb in and take our seats, but behold! Our backpacks were being hastily disgorged out of the bus from an open window into the stretched-out hands ready to receive them below. Then the driver pulled away leaving us with our cries and protests and our backpacks submerged in a cloud of fumes.

Ravi had blithely announced to the driver that we were his guests. He had mightily tricked us. And it was too late to do anything about it!

My shock rapidly dissolved as we found ourselves being boarded on a bullock cart, handily organized by Ravi who apologized profusely for the inconvenience. Our journey was taking a strange and wonderful turn.

It was easy to settle into this new adventure, my first ever ride in a bullock cart. I felt happy to have been plucked off the bus for this experience. The bullocks pulled the cart effortlessly – heaped as it was with passengers, baggage and assorted provisions – in a slow, rhythmic, soothing pace compared to the shrieking tempo of the bus that abandoned us.

We were on a dusty track to the village of Mauranipur. Soon we crossed an old stone bridge over a vast riverbed where many locals gathered to bathe and wash laundry. Then the path wound on for kilometres between beautiful fields of wheat and gram painted in the vibrant colours of sunset, and water pumps tapping melodically in the distance. This was the ancient face of India I had always dreamed of seeing.



All the while, Ravi talked excitedly about what was happening at his father's house. His father was none other than Dr. Kaushik, and he ran the village hospital in Mauranipur. A great saint and yogi, Norangivali Tutti Baba, had died in a temple in Kanchee, Madras two weeks earlier, and a room of the hospital has been transformed into a shrine for him.

Ravi was very eager for us to meet his teacher, the spiritual brother of this saint, who was presiding over the rituals. He was just as keen to promise us a feast including deserts of the best home-made Indian sweets.

Mauranipur village was surreal: ancient stucco houses, men and women clothed in homespun robes and saris, crop-tilled fields stretching beyond the

horizon. There was not a car to be seen, not a single paved road – just earth, sky, air, waterwheels, farmers and wooden ploughs, our bullocks and the giant-wheeled cart, and a hypnotic flute melody drifting towards us as we approached Ravi's home.

The 'hospital' was a two storey unfinished cement building, partly painted white, perhaps the only cement structure in the village. It was crude by any western standard, and grim for the black bars on every window; and too diminutive to be anything more than a clinic, let alone a hospital. I soon learned, it did not even satisfy that criterion for its lack of equipment and facilities. Still, to the villagers, it was undoubtedly an important place, one that signified great wealth if not medical expertise.

There was indeed a festive mood outside. Dozens meele of visitors were crowding into the front entrance. Here stood the flute player, a white-bearded old man perched outside the main doorway. Next to him, a rather disheveled villager danced to the flute music, contorting his limbs wildly while his shabby pink-stained clothing flapped at his sides.

We were warmly welcomed in and introduced to the Kaushik family. Soon, cups of tea, plates of Indian sweets and sitting mats were laid out for us. The aroma of curries was palpable. A group of ladies cooked and served unending quantities of hot food to a throng of villagers packed into the patio area at the centre of the building. They were fed in turn on long bamboo floor-mats where they sat, row upon row, eating from banana leaf plates – silently with their hands, as is the custom.

Between the heads of the crowd, I caught an unforgettable glimpse of a scene through a doorway. There sat an impressive shaven-headed man with shiny bronze skin surrounded by a group of elders. I began to intuit that potent celestial forces were at work here having diverted me so forcibly from my travels to meet him, Sri Kappali Baba, our host's teacher and, apparently, a saint.

Ravi ushered me barefoot into the room where Baba sat. I sensed that Baba was a revered yogi of sublime qualities. Facing the shrine set up for the memorial of Tutti Baba, he sat perched on the frame of a *charpai*, a rope-weave platform bed. He was naked save for a loin cloth, of long bony limbs and a radiant smile.

Around Baba, the old men squatted on a bare floor. I was curious why they sat lower than the youthful Baba? At first sight, I thought he was a teenager or in his

twenties. Now, when I sat down at his feet, I could see that he was perhaps middle-aged, but his eyes were a thousand years old!

To me, he had an unearthly, god-like aura. When I looked into Baba's eyes, I felt myself completely disappear. His smile filled me with inexplicable peace – and revealed that he had no teeth. Then I knew that Baba was a very old man, older than all the others, by far.

It was cool now, a late December evening. Yet Baba, sitting practically naked there in the chill air of the night, seemed to feel no cold. I also noticed that his disciples, who sat gathered around him on the bare cement floor, did not appear to feel any pain when they lifted a brass pot of boiling water straight from the fire with their bare fingers.



Baba was a *Shaivite*, a worshipper of Shiva, the deity of destruction, implying the destruction of evil in the world. Later I learned that he worshipped all the deities and related to all the world religions through a universal principle of abiding in unconditional love.

For centuries, forest *Shaivite sadhus*, renunciates, used potent herbs to raise awareness and enable an experience of the divine. These herbs also have medicinal properties to help endure sickness, intense heat or cold due to their nakedness, and stave off the pains of many other austerities including eating only once a day, sleeping little, and living in the wild. From ancient times, local

farmers also smoked tobacco mixed with cannabis after long work days to calm both body and mind, especially in remote regions.

Baba seemed to embody a radiant penetrating purity that needed no enhancement. His approach to the divine is through mental concentration and knowledge, the path of *Raja Yoga*. Well-known in these parts as a yogi of great power and wisdom, he was widely loved and revered.

Ravi interpreted for us while the elders spoke about Baba's mental powers such as being with one disciple and arriving at the home of another in a distant town on the same day. This meant little to me.

In his presence, a soft, sweet energy of pure happiness, universal love, and peace was transmitted. For me it was a coming home. He spoke of godliness, of brotherhood, of ideas I had always valued, and he would chant praises to God – godliness or Truth – with childlike devotion and spiritual love. I never met anyone of such humility, dignity, clarity, and palpable saintliness – apart from my mother. But she was not a yogi in India!

We had fulfilled Ravi's wish for us to come to his village on the promise of meeting his father and the great yogi, and tasting Indian sweets. But it became impossible to leave. I remained for three weeks. And even then, I left reluctantly.

At the hour of departure, Baba warned me that three things would happen:

I would be robbed. I would be misled finding the right way and become lost. And I would be separated from my partner, Pawan. All these came to pass.

Sri Kappali Baba also knew that I would see him again, though I was not sure how and when. And he was right.

Barely six weeks later, I returned to see Baba in his own temple, Ram Bagh, the garden of Ram, in the town of Rath, some two hours by bus east of this place.

March 8, 1974

We reached Rath after weeks of hiking in the Himalayas. At the main bus station, we took a horse-drawn *tonga* around the perimeter of the town to reach Ram Bagh. It was late afternoon. I nearly danced into Baba's interior cloister, such

was my excitement. There he sat just as peaceful as when I first met him in Mauranipur. He was keeping vigil at the sacred *dhuni* (see glossary p. 122).

Babaji exclaimed with surprise when he saw me. I bowed at his feet and received an exuberant slap on the back that thundered and shook me through and through. He patted the top of my head with his bony hand and offered a traditional blessing of welcome. O, the joy of reaching this hearth of love and prayer and being in his presence again.

Baba's love pierces all our masks and worldliness with its purity. I hesitate to even attempt describing or even knowing what that quality is but I am deeply and powerfully moved. Nor do I fully understand this brightness of mind blessing me until the moment I look at Baba and he nods, raising his palms skyward, as if to say, it is of the Divine, not himself.

When I think rationally on the ethereal nature of this 'energy', I am mystified. How did I come to be blessed in this way, with a pathway, a teacher, and a clear direction for spiritual immersion? I am. I know this from another dimension of my being irrefutably and I cannot, need not, prove it to anyone.

At any rate, I have been religiously educated and now embrace this feeling of unification, a humility, a holiness here on the very floor of Baba's room, sitting beside the hot coals of the *dhuni* ablaze with wooden logs.

Often a pot of tea is brewing, Baba's tea, a holy drink, naturally, the best in all of India. It is a blessed nectar of love. His disciples sit quietly around the fire within these ancient temple walls, clad in their plain cottons, barefoot, many of them farmers, merchants, family men, watching and helping out here and there to attend to Baba's food or other physical requisites.

From time to time, Baba rattles his *damru*, which is known as Shiva's instrument.



Its vibrations are said to reverberate cosmically and help regulate the universe. When Baba sounds his *damru*, we stop. But what he really invokes is our urgent attention to the imminent living presence of the divine within each of us. It's a commanding call, like a tribal chant beating from the heart of the forest.

Now the tea is ready. A cup of milk and two hundred grams of sugar wrapped in newspaper are brought in from the tea stalls at the nearby

bus station and offered into the brew. It boils up to the top of the pot, a second and a third time, tea dust churning inside the foaming milk – yes, the tea is boiled and over-boiled! Chopped ginger is tossed in, and a bit of cardamom if there is any.

All is offered and Baba offers it immediately back, distributing to whoever gathers near. In fact, we are getting much more than a delicious cup of tea. Baba teaches, *"Sab Ekh Hay."* All is one. *"EK, BAAS."* Nothing else but that. Only one. *That's it.*

He would repeat this, holding up his long thin finger as a sign of the unity of all religious thought in the world. Then he would indicate the flag flying atop the temple, with its five colours representing the five major world religions. *"There is only one,"* was Baba's creed. *"EKh!" We are all one! "Ye toh prem hay." This Oneness is prem, love."*

I am so lucky to be here. Having come such a long way, from the superficiality of middle-class culture in the West to this place of deep devotion and worship. It is a hidden place, like the hidden ones the world over who do not appear to be religious but indeed capture that divine love in their simple way of being, like my own parents! Even though they do not regularly practise the conventions of Judaism or any religion, they are deeply spiritual beings.

I am filled with such gratitude within me, and so much joy when I reflect on them and the way they raised me, and on the blood that runs in me from my ancestors. The only elder who, together with my own parents, survived the Holocaust was my maternal grandfather, Itzhak Szpiz. I called him Zedhale, the Yiddish word for grandpa.

I was named after his wife, my grandmother, Mary Kaganowicz. She was actually his step-sister. My Zedhale's father and my grandmother's mother were widow and widower and when they became husband and wife, each already had a child. So the two children grew up together as step-brother and sister and then got married!

More than ever, I feel rooted to all my dear ancestors including Papa's parents, Sarah-Zilla Fiksel and Joseph Remanik, his grandparents, sisters and his little niece who all perished. They live on through the pure energy that is beginning to flower within me.

March 10, 1974

Baba's Guru, the elder and first Sri Kappali Baba, were both disciples of a self-realized yogi who has his *samādhī* memorial in Anusuya Ashram in Chitrakut, Madhya Pradesh. A holy sanctuary, Anusuya Ashram is the sister ashram of Ram Bagh. The resident swami there is Swami Bhagwananand, a close friend of our living Kappali Baba.

A story about Baba's guru was relayed to me by one of his devotees, Amarju, who still visits Ram Bagh. Apparently, the elder Kappali Baba raised Amarju from death by his own hand and Amarju then never left his side.

One day Amarju went into town with his Baba. They entered a wine shop because the elder Kappali Baba wanted to try a drink, his first. The shop owner showed him a barrel containing one hundred litres of wine and unscrewed the tap. "*There you go, drink*" he told Baba, almost irreverently, as if to a lowly person.

The elder Baba knelt down, held his palm up to the tap, placed his mouth to the edge of his hand and proceeded to drink up the entire contents of the barrel! After one hour, he stood up and faced the astonished shop owner who asked Amarju, "*What does this mean?*"

Amarju replied: "*Nothing can satisfy our Baba.*"

The merchant fell to his knees and asked for forgiveness, "Excuse me, Babaji!" (a respectful form of address) "When I opened the tap, I was challenging you. But I cannot satisfy your needs."

Then the elder Kappali Baba asked for half a bottle of wine. When he had drunk it, he said to the shopkeeper: "*Now I am content.*"

March 11, 1974

Gutaly Baba, a senior devotee of the elder Kappali Baba, and 'guru brother' of our living Kappali Baba is visiting Ram Bagh. His temple is in Dattia, an ancient city, six or seven hours by road north. He spends all his days and nights in a grove of palm trees in the garden. Gutaly Baba is older than our Baba, and in poor health as he suffers from advanced lung cancer. His body is practically skeletal and sinewy like the topmost branches of a banyan tree.

A few devotees were tending to his needs and having *darshan* with him daily in the garden. Today I joined them. After exchanging greetings and paying my respects to Gutaly Baba, he motioned for me to be seated on the ground close by. The devotees arranged a piece of burlap for me to sit on. After a time of silence, he addressed me.

"Many raindrops fall at random and now you come, like a pearl, a diamond. Living here under the trees, the sky is God's roof, the earth his floor, I have no need for a shelter."

The ancient name of India is *Dharma Chettri*, or 'religious region'. The Vedas say that each man contains divine particles. Yogis are said to have the greatest essence of these particles and nowhere else are these masters of meditation as prevalent as in India. Perhaps millennia ago, that would have covered more of the regions of the Himalayas.

Gutaly Baba is soft and powerful. Like Kappali Baba, he has an uncanny way of penetrating my being. He is very still and silent, his thin body folded in the meditation posture. His eyes radiate that same immaculate love, kindness and a depth of understanding, devotion and purity that I experience when I have *darshan* with Kappali Baba. I am deeply nourished in his presence.

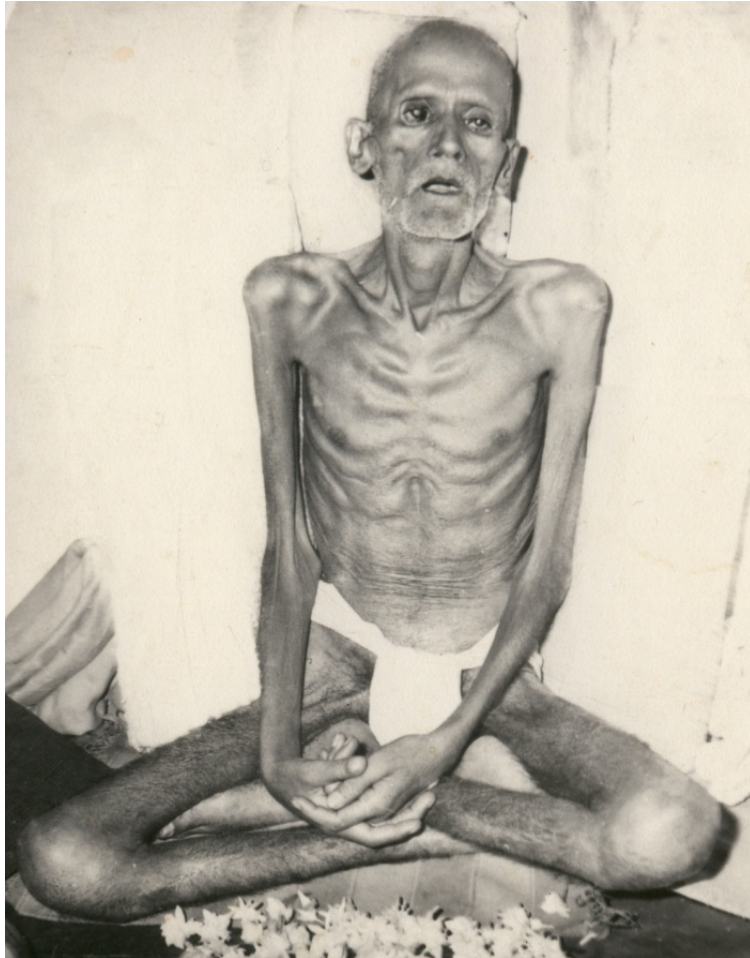
Now Gutaly Baba is near death, like a brittle feather about to be consumed in the next breath of wind. Seeing him so frail and yet so majestic is very moving. I silently pray to learn the direction of my path and how to pursue it.

I feel that I am sitting on holy ground, humbled by the beauty of his spirit and reticent to break the silence with questions. Yet Gutaly Baba seems to know my heart and spontaneously offers me teachings: *"Without a preceptor, we cannot find peace. No Guru, no peace. You should seek a guide, a spiritual teacher."*

Sitting under the trees with Gutaly Baba, I pen some notes in the journal I am keeping for my parents. He is aware that I know very little of local traditions, being a foreigner, and he gives me this pointed advice:

"You would be wise to keep the mind active but don't work so many hours a day writing, especially since it is very hot in India. You must learn to sit correctly in the presence of a yogi. Don't cross your legs but keep them in half lotus or rest them on the soles of your feet, bent at the knees. This is the polite way."

I was immediately inspired by Gutaly Baba to give up my jeans and Western way of dressing to don local cotton garments! And I took my first *brahmacariya*, celibate vows, with Kappali Baba a few days later.



Gutaly Baba died in June, only three months later. His devotees in Dattia observed the tradition used to memorialize saints. A crypt had been prepared while Baba was sick. When he died, they interred his body in a beautifully tiled chamber inside the crypt.

There they seated him in a meditation posture with some flowers and a few of his personal effects. Then after many rituals, chanting and distribution of foods, the crypt would be sealed. I was given a photo by one of his closest disciples.

The entrance to Gutaly

Baba's crypt faces the temple where he had lived for decades, in a dry mountain region outside Dattia. His many followers from Dattia and surrounding villages will be able to return again and again to pay their respects to their beloved teacher and guide. It would be a shrine for them in perpetuity.

I am so blessed to have met him at the pinnacle of his life. One day, I hope to travel there to pay my respects.

March 23, 1974

In his book, '*A Tiger for Malgudi*', R.K. Narayan describes a *sanyasi(n)* as "one who renounces everything and undergoes a complete change of personality. He obliterates his past life and is to be taken as he is at the moment. He does not refer to his earlier life and it would be a crass inconsiderate act even to ask him

his name. He assumes a new name bearing no mark of his ancestry or class but indicative of some general beatitude. He has freed himself from all possessions and human ties."

"A sanyasi is a wanderer living on alms, never rooted to any place except when he seeks the seclusion of a cave or forest at some stage for prolonged meditation. Among certain sects, he will even perform his own funeral ritualistically before becoming a sanyasi."

Raja Baba is Kappali Baba's oldest disciple. He also teaches me by example. He is fifty-two. He was born and lived in the village of Beri, the native place of the elder Kappali Baba. At one time he was a wealthy leader of his municipality and is actually from a royal family. When his wife passed away, he lost all desire for the world and became a wandering mendicant. Then he met Baba, shaved his head and became a *sanyasi*.



Like Baba, he has adopted the bare existence of the *sannyasin*, highest practice of the holy path, sacrificing all for his religious convictions and for realization of the highest Truth. He is a tender sort, unassuming with a determined look as if he is intently meditating all the time. He has not an atom of malice in him. Kindness, non-harming, self-contented, fixed on practice, he is a brother to all.

In the early dawn hours, though it is still cold, he bathes and performs his morning rituals, caring for the temple shrines and making things ready for everyone to join in the morning *puja* rituals and chanting. Whether he is busy sweeping the grounds or hauling water from the well, he intones a mantra softly to himself. I am usually up in time to help him with the work but even if I am late, Raja Baba blesses me with an air of sweetness and joy, never a word of reproach.

After breakfast, he is busy cooking lunch. Dhayi, the elderly village nun who became Kappali Baba's student, has returned to her small temple some distance from here. So Raja Baba has the complete charge of food preparation as well as worship activities. He seems, in fact, to manage the proper functioning of the whole temple, and does so without a word of complaint. His humility is a living example to me of a true devotee.

I am eager to help out but Raja Baba must teach me the traditional style of cooking here. He is the most patient of teachers. I learn to mix flour, roll it into dough, flap and toast the *chappati* just so; chop and grind spices, clean the dust and stones out of the pulses, prepare the *chulan*, the earthen fire, and cook the *dhal*, even to throw a *chonk* inside – a ladle of ghee and spices smoked first for a few minutes in the fire to impart a special flavour.

We also teach each other Hindi and English. We don't allow anything to slip by not understood; from the flying dust to the *chappatis* swelling up in the fire, laughter effuses from the kitchen. Our kitchen *puja* is full of joy.

March 26, 1974

I like to sit for a time beside the wheat stalks at the edge of the fields as they bend towards the light. Beside our well, young girls are working with their mothers to collect water. The older girls manage alone but always stop to help a younger sibling lift a full *ghunta*, the traditional clay water jug, and balance it on the circular cloth pad that rests on her head. Once their own water pots are loaded, they begin the walk homeward on the dusty road.

They are poised and graceful in typical royal blue work *dhotis* that flow from their shoulders, some of them with three, no less than two, clay jugs balanced one inside the other on their heads. I tried it myself, but could not support the weight nor even balance one *empty* pot on top of my head, let alone a full one. Out here, I am a useless city-bred girl.

Baba's power is a sweet benevolence, he is a spirit yet entirely human. He knows the hearts of his devotees. Even when I am away from him, I sense that he



knows my thoughts. Many a morning, wanting a cup of tea – suddenly it is brought to me by a passing visitor who had been sitting a while with Baba; longing for a sweet, someone - if not Baba himself – enters the courtyard where I am sitting and offers me some *prasad*, a blessed sweet from the morning prayers, or distributes sweets to everyone.

When I sit and meditate with the devotees at the *dhuni*, longing to go study in private, the next minute he is ordering me out, "Go study".

I am missing my stray friend, little dog Prema. She is not allowed inside the compound. Just today, Baba sends his magnificent dogs, Sera and Puniya to visit me.

It is dusk and I must relieve myself in the fields – Sera suddenly appears, sent by Baba to guard me – a white woman alone outside the compound. And Sera remains with me until I return to the temple though he has never accompanied me anywhere before.

I feel restless – Baba calls to ask if everything is right with me. I lose my laundry soap bar – Lachu delivers a new bar of soap sent by Baba, in case of need! The list goes on...

This evening, Babaji has pain in the chest and heart. We forget that he is old though he is energy and youthfulness belie his age. Mukian applies a salve made from crushed and heated grape leaves to relieve the pain. I feel empathy for his suffering and yet know that he is not disturbed by it.

I become more attuned to the pain of anyone here, any creature near me. With pain, Baba tells me to chant as he always does, even sometimes at a whisper just to himself. I observed the effectiveness of these mantras in reducing intense pain very quickly. The first time it happened, I was in disbelief, but then realised how invisibly my faith had worked. For without faith, what is there?

By certain austerities and scripturally documented yogic practices, a *sannyasin* can become a yogi, an adept at the yoga of the mind as well as the body. Depending on his or her level of accomplishment, such a yogi can perform certain practices by wielding one, several, or all eight kinds of supernatural power: become invisible, levitate, transmute metals, travel in space, read the mind of others, live on air, or have knowledge of past lives and of the future.

And, as demonstrated in Kappali Baba's lifetime, in certain circumstances, he can return the life force to one who has died. Such magical powers are the hallmarks of certain stages in one's evolution, incidental psychic abilities acquired on the way.

Baba always emphasized to me that these powers are to be ignored and are *not* to be sought after. They are a danger and a distraction from the ultimate goal to free and liberate the mind. For one who engages in such powers can be fooled into forgetting the journey, like one who stops in the shade of a tree and neglects to continue towards his goal.

Moreover, they should never be exercised for profit or self-promotion and if ever, should be used only minimally, anonymously if possible, and only to mitigate the pain and suffering of others.

Again and again Baba reminded me not to be diverted from my goal, to keep going on the path ahead however arduous and unpleasant it may seem compared to the cool shade of the tree.

इंगे लवटा

2. GREAT SWAN

Full Moon, April 1974

A silver moon caresses the blanket of the dark. Some singers arrive at Baba's door and we all go out to sit in the moonlight near them. There are seven men. Three play tabla, four use the *manjeera*, small cup-like cymbals or chimes. A tinkling begins, with soft drumming, then a clashing of stars and we walk with the gods on holy ground. The chants fill my ears and I am awash with peace.

In this transcendent moment, I open my eyes and there behold the thin form of Babaji sounding the *damru* in the blue moon night. He moves like a spirit. I know that it is Baba but I cannot recognise him, try as I might. Some ethereal force is present and it seems Baba is the intersection of the supreme and the human spirit, moving very subtly there in the moonlight to the perfect cadence of *manjeera* and responsive chants.



I feel such joy to witness this supramundane power. I am like a stone in the garden, a ray of moonlight, a night flier. I am the sound of two *manjeera* striking each other. Baba looks at times like a very old tree folding his branches to the

earth and then up to the sky. A moment later, he is an ancient man, five thousand years old, like the father of mankind. And I am absorbed in his energy, transfixed to this time, these moments, this unearthly dimension.

Suddenly, Babaji returns inside the temple, the musicians rest and the moon sails in her heavens. I hear the familiar sound of his voice perforating the veil of darkness while the singers smoke *bidis*, Indian cigarettes, and gather their instruments to retire. Ram Bagh lies in a sea of silver fields. Night birds and howling dogs are the koan of this memory.

April 3, 1974

I am the only female mendicant at Ram Bagh except when Dhayi comes. She is



a wild elderly woman of the fields, once married to the mad Bera Baba. Once, he tried to kill her and threw her into a well. Somehow she survived and ran away to Ram Bagh where she lived as a nun. Out of compassion, Baba allowed Dhayi to stay. He is her God.

This turned Bera Baba against all the devotees of Kappali Baba.

Though she has a mind of her own and often upsets the rhythm of the ashram life, Dhayi's heart is pure. Everyone knows that and they treat her like their mother. She has also

become a source of great humour, teasing and light-heartedness in the long hot days at Ram Bagh.

Stout and shaven-headed, she is a power unto herself and yet, hugely compassionate and humble. Dhayi moves through the cloisters at high speeds that belie her age. She wears a uniform of sorts, a rough stained wrap like a *dhoti* that is rank with the smell of ghee from years of cooking. While chanting

mantras under her breath, she will approach, bow on the ground and reach out to touch your feet. And if you try to stop her, she will physically fight with you until you give in.

Dhayi works unceasingly, tirelessly – cleaning, sweeping, and cooking for the Temple residents, though she has no concept of sanitation. I often fall ill from the food she prepares. Her practice may seem mundane, but at times I catch a glimpse of her in puja and she seems to be in deep meditation.

Today, Dhayi is away and I am duly initiated in the kitchen ritual. I sit in the shaded archway facing the inner cloister, cooking the community dhal. Baba is on the roof walking back and forth. Squatting on the tiles, I stir the large pot with a wooden spoon, eventually taking a taste to see if the proportion of spices is good. Suddenly Baba's voice roars out in a thunder clap, *"Hare!" O Lord!*

He scolds me – lightly. He realises my Western ignorance – for in Indian culture, it is strictly taboo to taste or put any food that is prepared for others into one's own mouth. Of course, Baba instantly forgave me. *"Koy baad nahin hain." It's nothing, it's all right. Never mind."*

One day, a well-dressed man was sitting near the *dhuni* wondering what possible relation he could have to Baba since he already had a guru. Baba read his mind and said to him, *"Anyone who teaches you something, he too is guru. That teacher who helps you to understand the composite significance of any other knowledge you have gained, he is your first guru."*

Kumbh Mela, Hardwar, April 15, 1974

An ancient myth of the Vedas, Puranas and other scriptures of India tells how the gods and demons once joined together to churn the ocean of milk, *Kshir Sagar*. They used the Mandrachala mountain as the churning stick and the Vasuki Naga (a serpent king) as the rope. This produced an earthen pot, '*kumbha*', filled with nectar, a treasure for possession of which the gods and demons at once commenced to fight.

During their battles, it is said that the pot of nectar was placed on the earth in four auspicious sites known today as Nasik, Ujjain, Prayag and Hardwar. In each of these spots, once every six years, Ardha Kumbha, and once in twelve years, Kumbh Mela, are celebrated. The appointing of regular places and times for

these holy festivals enables human beings to gather together in search of the experience of the transcendent far from the worries and distractions of their daily existence.

The ocean is a symbol of the human body, the microcosm of the great cosmic creation, while the gods and demons represent the forces of good and evil immanent in every individual. Each of us aims to realise our spiritual perfection – beyond the dualities of daily life with its pains and pleasures, joys and sorrows, good and evil, birth and death. This search for the divine is portrayed by the act of churning that produces the precious nectar. We are reminded that true transcendent experience in our own lives is to be found beyond external religious activities and forms through the realisation of divine love.

Now Babaji's devotees from the Ram Bagh family join the thousands of pilgrims at this year's Kumbh, crushed together, camped out, roughing it even by India's standards, and absorbing the indescribable dynamics of this event. A torrent of human beings squeezes into ever decreasing square metres of space, pitching every imaginable kind of dwelling contraption in the dusty kilometres of land along the great Mother Ganges as it gushes the Himalayan foothills this holy city of Hardwar. *Har* means god, divine, and *dwar* means door, gateway.

An incessant activity of daily life with all its clatter, chaos, worship and euphoria – the mundane, the exotic, hawkers, cripples, newborns, newlyweds, and the dying all vie for a place in this festival of the gods. There are hours of sitting together and daily forays to the Ganges, to the market, across the bridge to see the many religious seekers and sadhus chanting, sermonizing, and performing their rituals in this endless stream of humanity.

Inside Baba's tent we manage to preserve a sense of sanity, a fragment of space, even serenity. My mind contemplates and turns the question of the very meaning of life, here where it is so high-pitched, especially meeting the old woman, nearly skeletal, in the tent next to ours. She has come here with a one-pointed purpose – literally, to die at the banks of the Holy Ganges.

One afternoon, we asked Babaji about the yoga techniques that he practiced. Baba sprang up from his mat and sat himself just next to us in our corner of the tent. He fixed his attention inwardly on his breathing while assuming the graceful full lotus posture.

Then Baba harmonized the body with the rhythm of his breath. His drew in his stomach towards his back until it appeared like a great inverted bowl. The skin of his belly could have touched his backbone since scarcely one inch of space separated them.

Next, Baba rolled together the central muscles running vertically through his body at the abdomen. This created a ravine-like knoll that jutted above his still inverted stomach. His lungs expanded through the rib cage such that his chest mushroomed thickly out. With concentrated nasal breathing, he held this position for a startling minute before release.

Baba resumed his place on his mat in the centre of the tent explaining that this posture should be practised in a quiet forest area away from any disturbances, on a pure diet of milk and fruits. He described how he used *jalabasti*, a colonic/ intestinal cleanse, by sucking in water through his rectum, flushing clean the inner organs, and then releasing the water.



For a yogi to perform these Ayurvedic *mudras*, adeptness must first be attained in *uddiyana bandha*, the abdominal lock; *navli*, internal massage of the abdominal region; and *ashwini mudra*, a rhythmic contraction of the anal sphincter. Time and again, Baba's control over his mind and body fills me with awe.

August 1974

Baba explained why he touched the feet of other men. It is to break down their pride. Haredas and, after him, Raja Baba added that we must primarily know the core of our own being, to know that essence within which is pure. It is God's very seat within us – like a velocity light wave, brilliant, clean and omnipresent, and it is concealed by desire, which must be removed. We should live simply with high thinking, while cleansing our hearts in selfless action. In this way, we can break down that great obstacle – self-pride.

It is late and everyone has been waiting anxiously for the signal from Baba to eat. I have cooked many small tender *chapattis* or *rotis* for him, soft as a baby's since he has no teeth. Everything is ready and arranged on his *thali*, a tray, carefully covered to keep dishes warm.

Baba retires to the inner hall facing the *dhuni* and I follow behind him with his meal *thali*. He sits on a piece of old carpet, looking tall and gentle, like a swan, *paramhansa*, a great swan. Squatting in front of him, I set the *thali* down, bow, and with folded palms beg him to eat.

Babaji is so thin. He is in a tender mood. and tells me to eat, "*Tum khao.*" "No you, Baba. I will eat later."



"*Khau khau*, Eat, Eat," he says. He calls me closer until I am bent right over the stainless steel *thali*. Baba dips a bit of *roti* in the *dhal* and places the piece of *roti* into my mouth, chuckling, "*Leyho* (Here you go)." I am thoroughly blessed.

Now, to my astonishment, Babaji asks me to feed him. This is unheard of. First, he fed me from his plate, and from his own hand, like his child. Now he wants me to feed him like a little mother?

In awe, I approach on my knees, gently and carefully break off a piece of *roti*, dip it in the *dhal*, and stretch out my hand to offer it to Baba. "*Aur. More*", he instructs me. And this time I offer some *sabze*, cooked vegetable.

After two bites, Baba chortles, and dismiss me. "*Bhagau. Get out*" – local jargon for 'get lost'! And he abruptly sends me away waving his arm towards the door.

I am Baba's *Dharma* daughter. He does not only feed me the food of the body, it is spiritual food I am receiving.

Tikamgarh, Madhya Pradesh February 1975

Babaji is a *chamak*, a magnet. At the Bogri Ki Hanuman Temple, Baba's devotees gathered around the *dhuni* to honour the memory of Sarir Baba. At once, I set about making tea. Crowds swarmed in to have *darshan*, a glimpse or meeting with the holy one. During *arti*, prayer service, Baba sounded his *damru*. There was not much enthusiasm from the participants. Their mood seemed somber.

I was, however, overtaken by a power which I can only ascribe to the combined presence of Baba and the energy of Sarir Baba. From within, a gentle awareness of a cosmic nature overtook my mind. And I was certain Baba was radiating this force towards me.

I was smiling uncontrollably, but it felt a minor symptom of the inner joy, the emptiness of mind, and sense of suspension in a transcendent peace I had never known. A soothing AUM sound filled my ears, so that in spite of the flux and disturbance going on around me, I remained unperturbed.

When Baba addressed me, he asked me if I was in *samādhi*. He looked at me with his luminous eyes aglow and a richness of joy arose from the understanding that one glance imparted.

Baba suggested I make tea again. I thought that if I were to move even my head, the blissful state would evaporate. But it did not. Regardless of my activities, walking, bending, washing, tea-making – the blissful feelings seemed to pour through my forehead's centre point. Nectar of God's grace. Not a physical sensation, but as if the body had completely detached itself from me and the latitude of my awareness had expanded into an infinite band of light.

I felt in communion with all the saints and seekers of divine love and knowledge who were united in understanding, beyond time, body and illusion. I continued to carry out all my earthly duties but my joy could scarcely be contained. I was as if rendered invisible.

Everything of this world seemed distant and small. Only one reality supported me – the all-embracing bliss divine. My eyes could not see – as if they were shut to

the world; my ears – oblivious to the sounds around me as the inner vision of perfect stillness and a celestial silence filled my being.

After *satsang* I finally fell asleep and when I awoke, the power was gone. Moreover, the mind felt puzzled trying to recapture the fragrance of that feeling. I lay staring at the stars, realising that only on the spiritual path could I once again procure and attain that near state of *yogin*, one united with the divine.

Sunday, March 2, 1975

Babaji is so kind. When the little farm girl brings him some 'dhania' or mustard leaves from the fields, he calls after her to take coins. Naturally she refuses and Baba chuckles lovingly.

We are on the outskirts of town, a very dark moonless night, seven people on our way to a temple. Baba with his shiny black, plastic slip-on shoes, long sleek cane and simple shawl thrown about his shoulders – seventy-five years, or eighty, God only knows – walked so fast that all of us had to run behind him.

No, he did not run. He walked – long, flying, it appeared, leap-like steps – and all of us trailed behind him, trying our utmost NOT to admit to ourselves that we could only keep up with him by running as fast as we possibly could. Yet we lagged far behind this very old man – who was just walking!



I was so mystified that I began to laugh while panting. At one point, I fell flat on my face, being so out of breath from running at an impossible speed not to be left behind. Baba was far ahead.

The village men ran and ran, young and middle-aged sturdy 'salt-of-the-earth' farmers, chasing after him; and still, they were unable to reach him. Later on, when it was clear what we were experiencing and we knew that it was not a dream or a trick, Baba chuckled and slowed down to wait for us, giving us a chance to catch up.

This happened another time when we were followed by a mob – mocking and unfriendly in temperament. Baba walked at such a fast pace that no one else but Ram Bagh's lucky seven, his closest disciples we were, could keep up with him.

Baba reminds me: *"I am a poor man. What can you get here?"*

Then I reply, *"I have love here, love is God, so I have everything."*

Baba laughs approvingly. Then he waves me off with an affectionate gesture and another *"Bhagau, get out,"* – this time unspoken.

Wednesday, March 12, 1975

Baba called me to his *dhuni* today and tried to touch my feet, though I didn't let him, and vice versa. He would not allow me to touch his feet.

I had the inspiration to paint a religious picture in the temple somewhere. Baba suggested an image of Anusuya Mata from the story of Satee Anusuya beside the entrance to the elder Kappali Baba's *samādhī*. It resulted in much more effort than I had anticipated - especially with my energy waning noticeably in today's heat.

In the lazy morning, the painting stubbornly refused to form its impression on the wall. I stood all day mixing colours and applying them. At one point, Baba came and stood behind me for a brief time unnoticed, in full silent grace. I turned around suddenly to see his face, eyes now shut for a moment, a smile disappearing from his lips. I knew he was pleased. He later sent tea and sweets to encourage me. When dusk came, it was done and I could welcome night's rest.

March 16, 1975

During *puja*, Halke, the *pujari*, who officiated at *pujas*, gently swung the bell in his hand and circled from altar to altar carrying the precious blessing flame. I stood in the cloister before the main shrine with the other devotees, the open sky vaulting above us. Each of us had an instrument of one kind or another and brought forth a chime, a clap, thunder and resonance.

I beat a small gong with even strokes and suddenly felt the pain of separation from my beautiful parents. Stars peeked in beauty at us through the great pan of space and tears began to pour down my cheeks.

Quite suddenly, Baba appeared and stood opposite me. He picked up another gong and produced a series of golden tones in quick rhythm until I realised that his gong was dispelling my tears so rapidly that I had to control myself from bursting with laughter. It was magical. The inner smile returned. Baba never even looked at me directly but when my tears had subsided, he humbly bowed to the shrine and uttered many praises to the divine.

Tuesday, March 18, 1975

It was a needle moon and a bright day in the temple. I am becoming an expert at rolling dough and preparing *roti*. Baba allows me to take my meal beneath the moon in the inner chamber on the temple floor, lovely *dhal*, *roti*, and spices.

Baba walked up on the roof of the temple. For a few minutes, I thought I heard him running. I could see his sharp figure, glowing bare skin cut against the sky, a black silhouette. Baba says:

"Earth, water, fire, air and sky (space) – 5 elements make the body upon which we depend for life. We are born in dust and we die in dust, but our mind stream with its knowledge does not die. It is the only thing in the universe that does not perish with the body."

Again Baba impressed upon us that he is just a poor man.

"I am nothing. I have nothing. I am just an old man with a blanket. Be poor. We are poor folk. It is the only way to come to holiness – accept with gratitude whatever you have and want nothing more. Be simple, not covered in jewels and wealth."

This idea is found in the Bible:

"If thou wilt be perfect, go sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me. Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of Heaven. And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God..."

I am also reminded that the kingdom of God is a spiritual one – it is in the heart. The Hindu term for heaven would probably be translated as divine bliss, 'God' realisation, union of the heart with supreme knowledge.

I wish to follow the purest path, the surest path. Much to relearn and reorient my ideas back to their true source from which they strayed since childhood!

When I described a very vivid dream of mine to Baba about my visit to China, he asked: *"If you were asleep here in Ram Bagh, then who went to China?" It's Maya, all illusion."*

"There are three kinds of pleasure or bliss: the pleasure of the senses, the pleasure of learning Truth and the pleasure of experiencing Truth. Intelligent men are not proud because they understand that everything is transitory and if you want sight of Truth, then you should do meditation."

"One step upon the other, highest walk indeed."

One morning I am still lying up on the roof, too lazy to rise. The sun is already high, I've opened my eyes and shut them again, though I know that everyone else has been up since 4 a.m., diligently performing their morning bath, religious duties and meditation. Soon it will be nearly seven, time for morning tea.

Suddenly I look up and I see that Baba himself is standing right over me with a sweet in his hand, offering it to me. I am utterly abashed. He is urging me to wake up (in a higher way!) with complete compassion.

इंगे लवता

3. WE ARE ALL ONE

April 2, 1975

Babaji reminds me, "We are all ONE!" And in his traditional way, he holds up one finger to symbolise our oneness, "LOVE. ONE. One in LOVE."

I peeled dozens of oranges and distributed them on a brass tray as *prasad*. I always did this ceremoniously, first offering to the *dhuni*, one slice into the fire, then to Baba on a plate, and then to each person, walking around the *dhuni* area where there would be a mixture of satanic and pure hearted-devotees.

Baba and I carried on lengthy dialogues with our eyes and a few soft words here and there. He would say, "*There are many bad ones tonight, bad vibrations people.*"

Baba effused happiness. He was much like a master of ceremonies, host to a congregation of both exalted and confused, reverent and conflicted characters. But he handled everyone so easily, like the greatest, most beautiful 'brother' in the world.

He never lost his composure. Some people came not to learn but just to have a cup of tea and or a free smoke on the chelum.

So Baba would ask in a matter-of-fact way if they'd brought any grass, chelums or cigarettes to prepare a mixture... no, they would say meekly. Baba would respond with a chuckle.

"Hey brothers," he would ask the silent gathering, "didn't you find the chelum?" and he would grope in dark corners himself as if looking for it. Finally, he would give them some and after one of Baba's 'special' blends, they could handle no more.

Many times during the day there would be quite a few villagers cramped together around Baba in the small chamber. Mantras were intoned and sacred truths recited in ancient verse. Baba knew so much from memory.

Often I would pull out my notebook and try to copy down what I could with help from Raja or Halke. Sometimes a mellifluous *kirtan*, chanting of scripture, or a chorus of euphoric *bhajans*, devotional hymns, would ignite spontaneously in the charged energy of the room. All the while, Baba's mind would be penetrating the many hearts of those gathered near him.

Baba says, "*When there is jasmin, do not wear a rose.*" Baba loved the roses on the teacups. More than that, he loved real roses. Whenever one or two were brought to him, I would float them in a glass of water. Baba liked to cut a few rose petals into the grass mixture.

To show Baba's greatness, one impish youth who dressed like and pretended to be a *sannyasin* came to Baba's *darwar*, the doorway of a temple where people meet together. This boy sat down as close to Baba as he could, squeezing himself in to be close to Baba, rudely and noisily. Suddenly, he got up and sat right next to Baba on his *asan* or *gudi* (holy seat). It was, in fact, just a simple village carpet but it was only meant for Baba to use.

Everyone kept quiet. This was just not done. Baba humoured the young insolent and handed him a chelum. He took one puff but could not smoke anymore. He complained to Baba of always having his bag and money stolen. Baba told him, "*That's to your advantage because a real saint comes to God empty-handed.*"

In the night, the imposter came and lay down on top of me. I was sound asleep, Disturbed by his malicious energy, I got up and chased him away. He returned when everyone was quiet again. I awoke a second time and began to shout to

stir the others. Again, he ran away like a dog with his 'tail between his legs'. I retired once more, fearful of the corrupt minds and vulgar conduct that infect people in this world.

April 3, 1975

We are in Chattarpur at the *mahasamādhī* grounds of Sarir Baba –a revered saint who had left his body. His devotees installed a life-sized hand sculpted statue of him at the shrine. It will be blessed through many nights of chanting, prayers and worship.

A queue of distinguished and wealthy people are here to meet Baba because he is so loving and so mysterious. They come again and again. I do not feel the

heat when I sit at the *dhuni* gladly serving and caring for Baba's needs.



Tonight some of the men in the crowd seem in a hostile mood. Soon Baba emerges from the wooden shack and approaches the outdoor *dhuni*.

For a long time, he remains there watching everyone. Then he leans his upper body over the *dhuni* which is lit and quite hot. While in this posture, Baba begins to move his head very slowly backwards and

forwards in a mystical way. On seeing this, Baba looks to me like a sorcerer.

Very strong forces seem to emanate from him. The crowd is hushed. This goes on for quite some time. Later they turn into an uncontrollable mob trying to get some of the wonderful *prasad* (blessed sweets or fruits from a holy person – oranges, papaya, melon and sweets with curds that have been blessed. Baba simply says, “*Leave all attachments.*”

Baba patiently carries on with a *puja*. Eventually, the crowd is asked to leave so that he can take his meal. They refuse. So Baba packs off into the shack to be in the private proximity of his true devotees.

Separately, he calls us and offers each of us *parsad* with some spicy *pakor*as (vegetable fritters). Always late nights. By day the yogi sleeps. But throughout the night he is awake.

Some of the citizens of Chattarpur begin a *kirtan*, hymn singing late into the night. Their songs are so inspiring that Baba goes out to the *samādh*i and simulates a dance in a slow shuffling step to the rhythm of the *tabla*.

He looks like a tribal chieftain or a wizard. He is both a little boy and a powerful guru, a devotee of the highest, exhibiting many divine qualities. For the divine in human form takes on superhuman qualities.

One night, an epileptic came and asked if one of us would be an intermediary for him to Babaji. He sat himself down right at the *dhuni*, later on almost 'in' it. I kept on eye on him so he wouldn't fall in and burn himself. He was very nervous, fumbling a lot with his tea and insisting on lifting the burning pot out of the fire with his hands instead of letting me do it with tongs.

Baba never acknowledged him publicly. After *satsang*, we asked him if he'd spoken to Baba. Baba says, “*I never spoke to him.*”

But the man, when he regained consciousness reported to us, “*Baba addressed me in my heart and assured me that I would no more suffer this difficulty.*”

The man had clearly become very peaceful.

Monday, April 7, 1975

Several monks come to meet Baba. Since one or two are older than him, he gives them great respect even though next to him they are as lead to platinum.

The feet of many a devout person are touched by Baba in respect, but he tries to keep his hands across his own feet to cover them or he moves them away from the reach of people trying to touch them. But many of us are persistent and make every effort to actually touch those holy feet.

Baba always accepts our bows, a traditional gesture of respect and love. While devotees or visitors are bowing, or trying to touch his feet, Baba will ask them to stop.

"Bas, Baas! Enough, enough," he would say humbly with warmth and affection. *"Chalo, chalo, teek hai. Bas. Bas. Ab to jao yaha kee tahan."* Okay, okay, finished. Come on now, go, (local dialect meaning 'go from here to there'.)" *"SITA RAM, Blessings of the Gods."*

A woman came to Baba and told him that she was going blind, couldn't he please give her back her sight. So Baba said to her, *"What can I do, I'm also blind?"*

Later he told her as he told many who asked him to perform a miracle of blessing to ease some personal trouble: *"I don't know anything. I am nothing. I am nothing... go on, ask Sarir Baba, he is really God. He has all power of God. God knows everything."*

To us he would say, *"Don't eat too much. Always be loyal to the one who feeds you and gives you everything."*

This morning I wept. Baba did not see me cry as I hid myself in the dark corner of my room. I weep at the world, so cruel and hypocritical. In the evening, Baba said to me: *"Meera, Be brave. Don't weep. If you weep, weep to God. Let them be tears for Him."*

In some ways, the wooden hut, our campout at the *samādhi*, reminds me of the *Kumbh Mela* last year. But here we live like animals in a zoo. Raja Baba, who has himself enjoyed two straight nights of pure *samādhi*, calls it our bioscope.

The wooden planks of the hut are uneven and full of cracks. There are also four or five air vents large enough for a face to poke through, and an open space on the wood-hinged irregular door. People always peer in and stare. Stare, gaze, peek, some adults, some women, loafer students, dirty-eyed men, children – everywhere there are eyes peering in any possible opening as we sit

huddled in our wooden cage. That is why I love the quiet blanket of night when everyone has gone.

April 8, 1975

Today is a holy day and special prayers are planned, a *Narayana satsang*, gathering for the Divine. Huge quantities of food have been prepared in giant rented pots and vessels. Baba's discipleship has grown. Now a wealthy mother has been coming bringing beautiful flowers, fruit, sugar and tea mugs.

Thousands of people attend daily for Baba's *darshan*. Many ask what power he has. Shyam Sunder tells them, "*Baba can do anything God does. It's up to what he wishes.*"

Soon the *satsang* ends and the crowds begin to disperse. Around 9 p.m., an unconscious man was brought to the Sarir Baba *samādhi* grounds. He was found lying in the forest and was thought to be suffering from a poisonous snake bite. His relatives called for help from Baba.

Shyam Sunder hurried to inform Baba. But Baba told him, "*He should be treated in hospital. I don't know anything.*"

I did not realise what had happened until I came out of the hut and saw the victim lying on the ground quivering and crying with pain. Then he seemed to relapse into a coma.

After some time, Baba came out of his wooden hut and stood over the stricken man. He began to turn the *damru* (his hand-held 2 sided drum) fiercely until it thundered. As he did so, the man's leg vibrated like an electric fan. The second time the *damru* sounded, his other leg vibrated. Baba beat the *damru* a third time and disappeared inside the hut.

No sooner was Baba gone, than the quivering subsided and the man fell into a deep sleep. Later, he regained consciousness and became well. When Shyam Sunder went inside to tell Baba this surprising thing, Baba's eyes gleamed and he chuckled. "*I didn't do anything, I'm nothing, I tell you. It must have been the damru. I know nothing about treatment. This miracle is only the damru!*"

And he waved his palm at us in a serious gesture of denial!

April 18, 1975

We have returned at last to the tranquility of Ram Bagh - fragrant incense at the shrine, the temple spires, the *dhuni* crackling with flames, and the peace of centuries.

I sat on the steps in the shade of the inner temple memorizing a Sanskrit verse when Baba strolled up to me in silent grace. He had a simple white shawl draped upon his shoulders and a rose in his fingers. Stretching his right hand out towards me, he



offered me the rose, and softly, silently withdrew into the temple. My heart was awash with radiant joy.

I mailed a volume of this journal to Mum and Dad, dedicated to them, the ones I love. They gave me love, OM, life, and an open heart. They instilled me with this thirst for Truth.

In the company of a *Satguru*, one is virtually in the presence of God. I took ash on my forehead from the *dhuni*, then crawled up the narrow staircase just above to take rest on the rooftop of the old part of the temple. From there, I could sleep to the lullaby of the neem treetop branches dancing in the wind and still catch pale shadows of the ancient temple spires in the cool night air.

On one such night Baba sent a message describing the route I could travel to the USA to see my ailing father at the very moment that I lay thinking and planning a way to visit Mum and Dad. How he crawls into my mind, even when my thoughts are in English!

April 20, 1975

O Truth divine, but for a glimpse of Thee. Day by day I become illumined by my Baba. And yet I remain in darkness, in Maya. But he says: "*Maya too is within the magnitude of the divine which encompasses all.*"

I must understand what he is teaching me. "*To have the sight of God requires complete purification - this is the teaching of Self-knowledge.*"

I wrote in my book: If self divine which lies within, from natural bonds be severed, The mind is freed eternally, transcending pain and pleasure.

Baba often chants from *Prem Yog*, a collection of religious poetry (mixed with other sources). The author is Paltu. Then he asks me, "*Meera, Where is your book? Write, learn.*"

These lines are translated from *Prem Yog*:

*He who is a false lover of Truth (God), in the world give him no respect
but strike him with a shoe.*

Love is not simple, it is not treacle to be eaten.

Anything that lives is mortal, impermanent,

Therefore, do not hope to remain in this body.

*One who truly loves God (Truth) remains day and night in meditation
on his death spar (release).*

He respects, admires the divine and does not sleep fully.

He won't weep for a drop of oil, blood or meat."

Paltu, the poet, calling himself a fool, says:

He who truly loves the divine must be ready

To cut off his head by his own hand.

No, this love is not a simple love."

April 21, 1975

We sat quietly in Ram Bagh waiting to catch a bus to the village of Pawai. Baba had been invited to conduct a fire sacrifice by some of his old devotees. Two days running now and we are sitting and waiting. It never seems as if Baba is going anywhere. He is beside the *dhuni* carrying on with the daily routine, cups of tea, flies and sweets, stoking the log fire, sweltering heat and laughter of the heart.

Lo! Baba sounds his *damru* and we frantically sort out the gear to be ready to board a bus. It is a terrible crowd but we manage to find standing room for all of us and a seat for Baba. Seeing the mob of bodies thrust so carelessly together in this way, it appears that the local folk must be wild and perhaps co-exist so peacefully only by virtue of their extreme tolerance.

Baba says: *"It is Kali Yug, the Era of Universal Degradation. Man is growing more corrupt. But it is still possible to know divine Truth— even in the midst of all troubles and discouragements, we must remain pure in heart."*

I find this the most difficult task. I look at all the stubble-faced men stampeding each other with knees and elbows. Who can I love? It is to beautiful souls that my heart is attracted not to weeds and withered fools.

Baba points out, *"We are all fools."*

On the bus Baba is silent but many a morning and evening, Baba's nectar flows when he sings to us, his voice crying and chanting with profound love:

"O Almighty Lord!

You are my creator, my destroyer. I am of the dust of your feet.

Let your power be manifest to me!

*I toss my abode of life to Thee across the greatest beyond
in the ocean of space.*

Thorns are on my left, thorns are on my right.

These thorns that surround me everywhere,

Let them pierce me and change me into flowers

To reflect your beauty and grace.

Who will torment and tease me for I have suffered much

In the agony of our separation, my heart is besieged.

I would that you raise a sword to my throat and cut my head

Though I have bowed it many a year to thee

I gladly offer it to you now.



And I wrote:

"Give me life, give me death

Give me pain, give me breath.

*My life is a moment, a second thought
This body can burn
But the heart cannot."*

Baba says: "You need no temple to win the heart's freedom. Simply dwell in the Temple of your own body. It too will be cast out!"

*Then he chants this hymn:
"This is a house of love.
It is not your mother-in-law's house.
Only he who would cut off his head
And lay it on the ground
Can sit inside this house.
It is the house of the divine
And we must fully surrender
To know that love."*

No sooner do we step off the bus in the midst of barren fields, than we are spotted by a young farmer with a deformed hand. He runs towards Baba and kneels down in the brown dust to touch his feet. After a short walk, we reach the village of Pawai and are joyfully welcomed at the farmhouse of Matthur, one of Baba's kindest devotees.

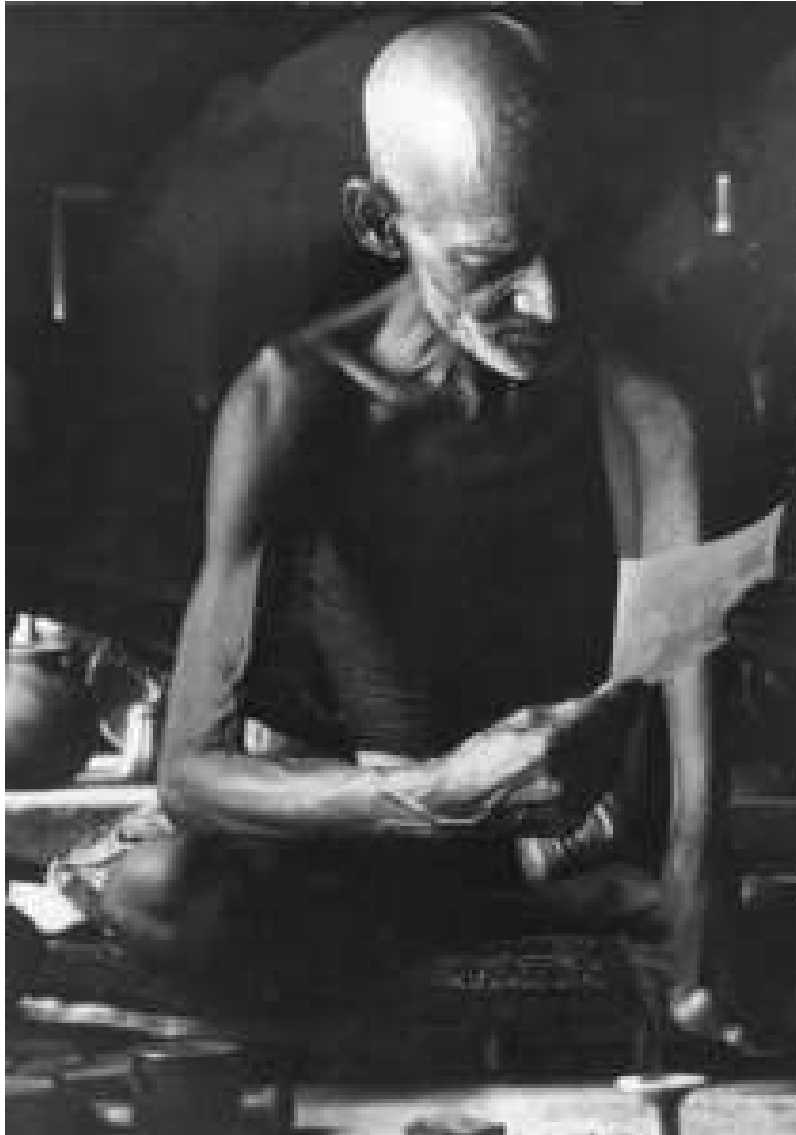
We spend the afternoon sitting in the shade beside one of his Matthur's fields, watching the wheat being separated from the stalk and the grain collected in baskets to be carried to the village. Two enormous bullocks are led round and round atop the first crop cuttings to loosen the stalk with their mighty hoofs. And a slow stream of villagers, farmers and all their children, the wives hidden in old green saris, come to take today's *prasad*, curd – and they come shyly to see us.

Simple faces, gazing in earthen innocence. I am struck by the contrast with the faces of the town children who seem more spoiled, clever, conflicted. These children are like blades of grass on a hillside growing together in the sun. Not a blemish of dust on their stems, not a sewage smell or a crushed look.

Now a handful of disabled tots beside Baba massage him with their impish hands. He laughs with delight and sits with them. One boy is missing an eye; another has a twisted hand; a third, a deformed leg, and so on. But they are bubbling with happiness. They extend their little palms towards me, upturned to

receive sweet *prasad* while they scan me with curiosity. My heart is filled with compassion.

May 1975



The ladies came to wipe the earth using a mixture of cow dung and water. They spread it on the floor inside and around our shelter. It is very sanitizing. Some attempt to clean here, at last! Baba called out to them, "*Should I come out to spread dung?*" They all laugh shyly hiding their teeth behind the upper cloth of their saris.

And in the evening, as I am preparing the meal, he appears by the *chulan*, the fire stove, asking endearingly, "*Meera, should I make roti?*" It is too funny to even write! Whenever the farmers come around, Baba jokes with them. He makes them laugh so easily with stories about

cows and crops and wells and drought, for he too was once a farmer.

May 5, 1975

Baba says: "*I am not coming back into this world again.*" This means that he is a *Satguru*, he has liberated his heart. This is the highest state a human being can reach. He has complete control over the five elements, higher knowledge and

knowledge of past and future. But no powers are used by a truly free soul for any show or gain. He simply goes on in devotion and worship most humbly.

Baba says: *"We are shit. Latrine substance – there is no difference.*

We are dust, and we are here but for one moment, then gone in the universe. One who remains happy in life is always far away from the troubles of the world – because he is nearest the Supreme."

*"Who is true in promise, simple, poor
Understanding any other woman as his
mother
In this much, he should find God
For this is the word of Tulsidas
(a well-loved Indian religious poet):*

*"Listen friends, we do not know what will
happen to us – even in the next
moment."*



May 6, 1975

My friend the elephant came to drink at the outside well today, a very docile and affectionate creature. He kneels down to let me climb up on his back for a short ride, but then, of course, asks for a treat. I offered him a piece of gur, unprocessed sugar cane, holding it below the opening at the tip of his trunk. He lifted his trunk and casually pointed to his opened mouth as if to say, "Meera, please put it right in there!". So, thoroughly delighted, I did!

Late in the night, Baba was bitten by a scorpion and all our family suffered his pain. I have seen others writhe in fierce agony. Baba sat calmly. This is the power of a yogi. *"Kuch Nahee ha,"* It's nothing, he whispered. *"Leyho,"* There you go.

He pointed to the sole of his foot. Not twenty minutes later, Mukian sat on a scorpion and was bitten – he was extremely brave. By grace of Baba he told us that the pain was slight. Baba says: *"When we are in dire pain, we remember God; so at that time, only repeat the name of God – this is the pleasure in pain; pleasure is too temporary, pain is necessary."*

Even with a 'disturbed' night from the scorpion bite, perhaps more so for us than for Baba, he is up again early in the morning ready to take us to Amarpura, 'immortal village' where there is a second 'Ram Bagh', some twenty-eight miles in the interior.

We travel by bullock cart on the narrow grooves in the dusty fields . Hot winds of the dry season blister us as we move slowly across the scorched lands. After a few miles, we reach the edge of a great jungle where there is a land of mammoth crevices and hills, like gats in a dry river, so rugged the earth here that it cannot be farmed.

The village wells are seventy metres deep, as deep as the peace of isolation from the world – from which here I feel so distant, as if I am breaking free from the cycle of rebirth in the current of the ocean.

Baba says I should be the disciple of Dhayi. So every night I light my ghee lamp in worship and say Sita Ram to all. He suggests I go live with her. *"No, please Baba, with you."*

And the days slip by in tranquility, studying, meditating and noting down as much of Baba's teaching as I can, with Raja Baba's help.

When there was jealousy or conflict among the devotees, Baba reproached them: *"No jealousy," he would say, "If you cannot keep peace between yourselves, then you must leave. Please don't bring pain into my heart. I've renounced all these preoccupations. Now you bring them in front of me again, like poison!"*

Then he chanted these verses:

*"The man who lives under control of another
Is not happy even in his dreams
The highest woman lives in her heart
Never thinking even in a dream of another man.
We are one essence.
Be conscious, alert. Be true.
We are one. See the derivation of God's name."*

May 11, 1975

Every day is a lesson with Babaji. I watch the grains being brought in by the villagers as offerings for him. We ate *bara* today, a dhal that is ground, fried and soaked in buttermilk. For my stomach cramps afterwards, I took some mint out of a little bottle.

A great peace descends on us in the immortal village, Amarpura. From the west horizon, jungles doves sing out. Their call sounds like names of God. Baba listened and repeated it. Radha Krish, Radha Krish. And Baba sings:

"Who tries to know the heart, should know love.

If you can know love, then you can know Reality.

We are only shadows of the Real."

Our morning departure from Amarpura was well-timed. The *lapat*, hot winds, did not blow until after we had reached the main road. Our bullock cart carved its path through the dry dust as our last vision of Amarpura and its green cluster of trees receded into the landscape.

I love the typical oversized doorways and tall village farm houses, each with its own courtyard opening onto the interior rooms, buffalos, bullocks and white cows waiting by their feed pens and the old fashioned main gates hinged a hundred years ago. And therein – a peace, so palpable, the pace of each day, a fable. It was like leaving the castle of King Arthur until everything became swallowed in dust.

This is the wedding season in India, especially in these villages. Drums and flutes play through the night. Sometimes on the bullock track we meet a caravan of wedding bullocks heading from one village to the next.

Sometimes we spot a dead cow lying in a field with a group of buzzards feeding on its carcass. I'm reminded that we are all going to dust. Baba sings: *"Laughing O laughing, gladly with God's name on our lips, we go to dust, to our death spar."*

May 12, 1975

Waiting by the main road in a dusty brick shelter, weary and hot, I try to chase the crowd of staring faces away from the doorway.

Baba entreats me, *"Be in shanti, in peace with everyone, give peace to them, treat everyone the same. Let them stand now, we are strangers here."* I examine myself to try to live up to Baba's exhortation.

One man in the crowd called me a drunkard. Someone answered that I drank with Baba the cup of Shankar. I was overcome. *"Yes, the cup of love"*, I declared.

Everyone grew friendly after this, seeing that I could understand them and hitting a religious verve. I smiled at one impish lass and all in all won their peace, so much so that they searched out four seats on the overcrowded buses until along came a wedding bus. It would not have stopped but I stood out in the road in plain view – white, Western, not seen in these remote villages.

May 14, 1975

Memories of sitting in the garden of Ram Bagh with Gutaly Baba last year. He told me: *"Learn Hindi and come to Dattia. "No Guru, no peace."*

So true. Now I see with Baba as my Guru what a peace has overcome me. All my desires and extraneous attachments are flaking away. I am left with a lifetime path by which I love to walk my way to realization of the divine.

Sitting on the rooftop, Raja Baba told a beautiful story of Lord Rama testing his true lovers. He requested two devotees to offer their son to his lions after they cut his body into pieces. They did so without even a cry. When it was finished, they sat to eat together and Ram made a fourth plate be set for the son who then reappeared alive!

Like God asking Abraham to sacrifice Isaac... then seeing his readiness to do it, God stopped him and said, *"It is too great a sacrifice for me. Offer instead a goat."* And I am asking myself, *"Will I be the sacrifice of my parents to God?"*

I watched Baba standing and dousing water upon himself, so lean, his skin glistening against the dried out garden, like a figure in black marble. He says, *"Endure life's pain, be poor, then become pure. Simple we grow holy."*

He is answering me.

When a devotee had lustful thoughts towards me, Baba called him from the next room, having read his mind, and said: *"Control your organs, control the senses. If you get self-knowledge, sight of soul, you will have everything. This is all temporary. She is your Mother. You should see her as your Mother and not as a woman."*

O Lord, may I be pure of heart, and leave all physical attachments. May I meditate only upon your infinite greatness and love.

May 16, 1975

Baba came to sit on the roof and expressed concern about my father who has a bad heart. Baba says it is due to attachment, that I ought to go home to see him. *"Leave attachments,"* he said, *"This is all illusion. We are all one. Even an ant has a consciousness. We are one with all-creatures."*

Baba apologized that he was too poor to pay for my ticket home! When I said there was enough money, he was surprised and happy to hear it and advised me not to tell anyone else because the world is full of devils. He always encourages us: *"Be poor."*

I must be poor as in content with little and humble. Baba teaches me how to be happy and poor, not to want for things but to keep giving up the world. He teaches me how to develop the heart and find inner peace that can spread to others. I wrote to Father, expressing my love to him, trying to familiarise him with my way of thinking.

"Dearest Papa,

This is my special letter to you, a kiss from my soul, a happy flash of starlight from my heart... I travel everywhere within my mind and continually return home to you. I am here, there and everywhere, no dilemma since my heart love is scattered like lunar dust all over the world. By birth I am your daughter, and daughter, sister, mother to many; united in one transcendent mind.

We are dust of the earth, not different, formed from the five elements and invariably returned to them. We are one and the same, moving and perceiving in bodies which are separate, but soon ascend and emerge into one. Only for a sparkle of time am I in this body enjoying the creation and suffering the pain of living and dying.

While I see, hear, have vitality of awareness of mind, may I reflect on the power in which I am forever embraced, meditate on that Supernal power, and chant in praise of that divine love. I need give so little, yet in return, I receive vast treasure. For if the temple of my heart is opened, I am flooded with light and contentment.

It is glorious to be simple, to have nothing, it is worthwhile to accept the greatest pain, the worst humiliation, the loneliest path – these are life's tests to make me worthy of self-realisation. All that is temporary, including the 'body', could not infringe upon my heart's purity once I have achieved control of the senses and enough faith. Then, my true nature will radiate wondrously. This is the highest state of consciousness, total union in self-knowledge.

Papa, if you meditate on me, we can enjoy much dialogue in the universe. There is no distance between beings bound in love. We are always in touch. I try to think only beautiful things and pray in the quiet of early morning and evening when day and night inter-twine. At these times, the sun awakes and sleeps.

When I concentrate on a pure idea or object, a loved one, an image or symbol of the divine, I experience a release of inner energy and joy. Nothing matters in the little world of mice and men. It is entirely a wink in space, a drop in the ocean and I am glad to notice it and turn to knowing that which is Infinite.

*In that Universal love, ever
Your Meea*

इंगे लवटा

4. I AM YOURS, YOU ARE MINE

May 17, 1975

I've been like a nurse, helping Pujari to heal from malaria, tending to him with cold compresses for his head and soft foods that he can easily eat. Now I am looking after Babaji. He's fine. He took some psyllicin that was sent to me as an experiment.

Now he was lying with his back to the *dhuni*, very quiet. The hot winds still swept dust from around its hearth and with it flew ashes from the hot coals. Baba sat up on his *charpai* and asked me, "*Meera? Meera, What time is it?*"

By and by, the disciples gathered around to make cups of tea. Baba noticed his pulse getting very fast and asked me to check it. "*Strong as a baby's,*" I assured him.

He seemed to think that he would soon depart his body, as this is one of the symptoms, along with the fact that he was sweating, something that Baba never suffers even in the worst heat. A strain of panic began to circulate.

Everyone had the impression that Babaji was going into *mahasamādhī*, death, and for a great yogi – liberation. So something had to be done. Baba smiled at me and turned quietly to catch the eyes of his devotees.

"Leyho, khate ki gur tha! She says that she only gave me a bit of jaggery."

Pujari brought some curd for Baba and viewed the scene with some amusement. He had just recovered from a serious illness under my tender and devoted care and I had earned his trust. He and Raja both believed that I knew

exactly how to minister to Baba's mysterious 'illness. Pujari's father, however, the gloomy Pandit, sat cross-legged by the *dhuni* preparing tea and eyeing me scornfully.

A yogi, I learned, controls his rate of respiration, an important factor in his mental, physical and spiritual evolution. The more breaths, the sooner his departure from this world. Apparently he had a limited number of breaths in this life. I was assured that he could make up for the heavy breathing now by holding his breaths later on.

Baba was play-acting with us. But his laughter that gave away his joyful state of mind. Though I was not certain whether to expect the passing away of his body or just the sustaining of his daily affairs, he seemed equally peaceful with both possibilities.

This evening, Pujari's father, the irascible Pandit, stayed behind to tidy around the *dhuni*. Knowing his aversion to help with any of the chores, I guessed he had some ulterior motive for remaining alone with Baba. I had guessed correctly.

I thought it best to keep a distance so I lingered outside but within earshot. It felt important to be on hand in case Baba needed me for anything, as I knew what he had taken and what to expect with the experience. So I was particularly sensitive to his needs at this time.

Besides this, I felt an overwhelming desire to be with him in the miraculous peace of his presence. If nothing else, I wanted to see the profound emptiness of his eyes from time to time, reminding me that this being had become self-realized. I knew the benevolence of seeing the Guru for it was akin to seeing a reflection of the divine.

I could plainly hear the agitated tones of Pandit's voice as he addressed Baba. He could not have known how much Hindi had learned or he would have surely censored his choice of subject matter. I made my presence visibly known, humming a chant as I did some work in the cloister, so he probably thought I could not follow the conversation. But I could and it was shocking.

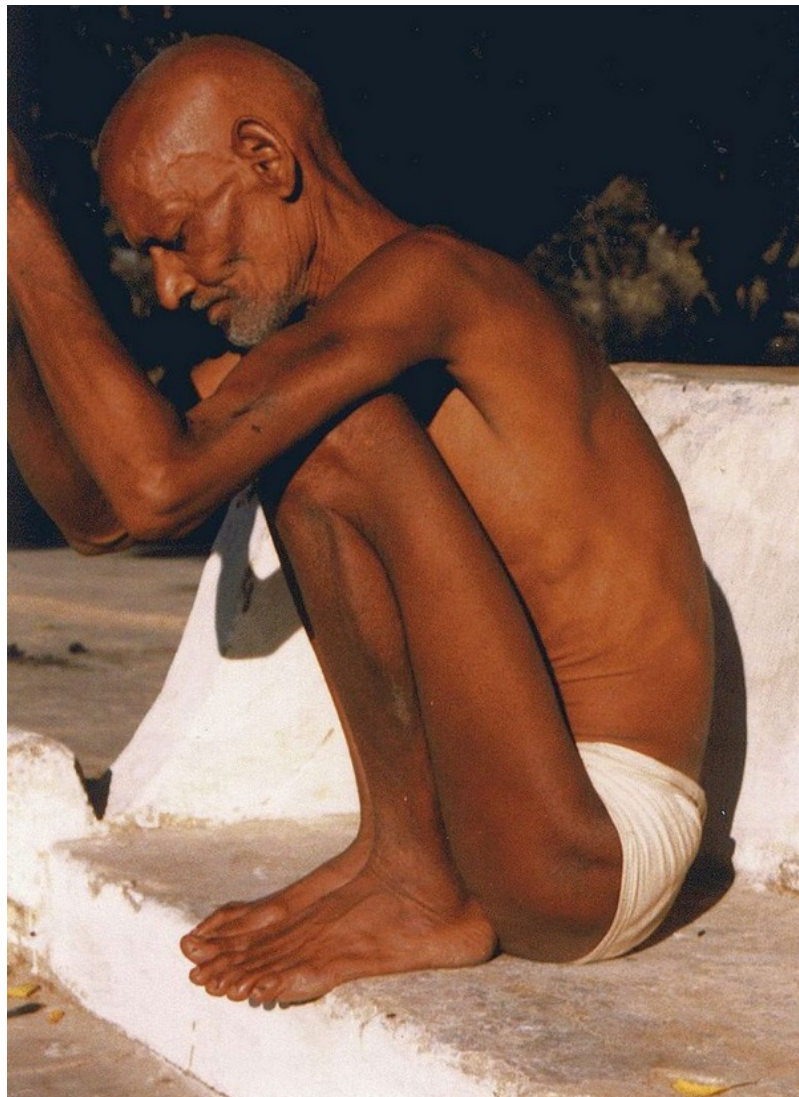
He was trying to convince Baba that I wanted to poison him and take over the temple with Pawan. My mind sputtered with disbelief. If it had not been such an

ugly and malicious idea, I would have laughed at its utter ludicrousness.

Babaji seemed to be listening to him as if he could be convinced. Pandit suggested that Baba send us away or otherwise notify the police. Baba never agreed to what the man was saying, nor did he disagree that we had plotted to do him harm.

Then Baba called me. I came in immediately. Pandit sat frozen to the floor. I smiled warmly trying to be kind in the face of his mistrust. Perhaps that would dispel his absurd suspicions.

Baba became very stern for half a minute, admonishing me with his finger and looking at me with reproach. But his eyes were playful. It was a little confusing, because he kept calling me, "*Shetan, Meera shetan ho. You little devil, Meera, devil.*"



I almost convinced myself that Baba really thought I was a devil, that now he believed that I had tried to poison him and he would make me leave. He repeated to me three times that devils could not remain near him, with his eyes casting about through the open doorway to the courtyard outside.

Then I realized he was pacifying the Pandit. He told me to get out, sportively picking up the metal fire tongs, and shooing me outside with a gentle stroke of his hand in the air. I went out again with a sense of relief.

The sun was cool and low, now, a pleasant start to a quiet evening in the fields around us. Some travellers were camped nearby. The haze rose and straddled the treetops while parrots and crows flapped about in the business of searching for supper.

Baba strolled out and perched himself on the concrete wall leading from the garden. I sat nearby to bask in his aura. He asked me what it was he had taken. Since we were out of anyone's hearing range, I explained that it was a very old and powerful medicine used by the ancient men of America to heighten spiritual consciousness.

It is known that North American Indians have used the hallucinogenic peyote and psilocybin for hundreds of years as initiations to the Supreme Being. I remembered my reading of *The Teachings of Don Juan, A Separate Reality* and others by Carlos Castaneda.

Baba said, *"Do not give it to anyone else. Not everyone can understand this, not everyone can take it."*

It is also a medicine taken in the Himalayas of Northern India by many *saddhus*. It grows in the area near Amaranath cave, the celebrated holy site where ice forms a natural Shiva lingam each year. This last bit of news appealed to Baba as Amaranath is mentioned in our daily prayers.

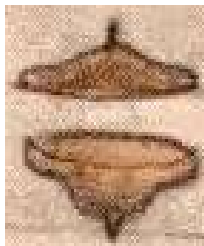
In the next few hours, time and again Baba was asked by the temple devotees what I had given him. Once he replied, *"It is a herb from Amaranath."* Meera, *you little devil, don't give that medicine to anyone else.* "But, Baba", I protested innocently, *"it was only gur."* And his candid laughter resounded through the temple.

Eventually, the *bhajans* began, and the chants, and then Baba sang. A silken sound so other-worldly that consciousness expanded and my body became very faint if perceptible at all. When the singing ended, there was the familiar call to emulate all saints and devotees. And again the awesome quiet.

"Where had I gone?" Baba wondered. *Why, out in the garden where the falcons were screaming in the night."*

Now Baba called for puja. All stood together, their lips sealed and their eyes riveted on the young pujari as he lit the ghee in the oil urn, swirling it in the air at the altars in the inner temple. His light inundated me inwardly and flooded the temple cloister and outward to the far dimensions of earth.

With palms folded together above our chests, we all stood in a semicircle at the central shrine. Each devotee played some sacramental instrument, a gong, *manjeera*, the *damru*, two enormous drums in palpitation, the crying conch shells which concave one's lungs, the cymbals with fastened bells, together reverberating and echoing in the temple walls creating a crescendo that shattered the darkness.



Tonight, an infectious intensity gripped us and transformed our prayers into a cosmic awareness of divine interface. I was playing the *manjeera*, the small cymbals, completely absorbed in the sound until I noticed that the sounds from all the other instruments had subsided. It grew so quiet. Baba stood like a slender wildflower in the darkness at the far end of the line. His rich voice underscored all our voices and musical sounds.

I was astonished to think that this graceful reed of a man could create so powerful an energy as if divine forces were converging on us. Afterwards, we came silently, one by one around the temple altar reaching the *dhuni* at last to touch Baba's feet.

Everyone gathered around Baba. I sat amidst them and followed the soundless hum of our hearts. Suddenly Baba praised the beauty of the prayers this evening. We nodded in assent. "Did you feel God joined our puja tonight?" We all felt the divine radiance.

Now Baba was commending me and telling the devotees that I was a *devi*, that they should ask forgiveness from me. Tundan was trembling, tears streaming from his cheeks. I assured them there was nothing to forgive. I only wanted them to believe that I had done no wrong to Baba or to anyone in the temple. Suddenly, Baba reached over and touched my feet before I could withdraw them and claimed I was *Devi Shakti* - goddess power.

In the still hours around midnight, Baba was asked about dinner. He had not eaten all day and we kept prodding him to eat something. But he felt neither

hunger nor thirst nor fatigue nor pain. By this time, I was thirsty so I went to get a lantern to watch for scorpions in the dark corridor where I kept purified water.

As I approached the doorway near the jug, an unknown night crawler jumped on my back, then onto the floor and scurried into the night. I gasped with fright and my heart beat rapidly as I raised the lantern to examine the area. I caught sight of a swarm of creatures running away.

In fact, the shadows of a nocturnal lizard had spurned these frightening visions. He was gone now. Native lizards in this area do have a poisonous bite but they are not so apt to bite a human merely upon contact as a scorpion.

Mission accomplished, I scurried back barefoot to the *dhuni* as I whispered to all potential night-wanderers: *"Run away little friends, to your insect haunts. Don't let me step on you!"*

A severe heat rose from the night air mixing with the *dhuni* fire. Baba sat crouched over the flames, reaching his head out about them almost as if he would be burned. He seemed unperturbed by the fire and swivelled his head above it from side to side like a crane.

This head movement churned up some kind of supernatural energy that spiralled in the room and created a draft of cool air. I smiled when I realised what it was and was grateful for the coolness on my neck and cheeks. Although I stayed near the fire, I did not perspire but continued to feel refreshed. Everywhere else in the temple it was extremely hot and humid.

Baba kept chanting with his head moving in front of the flames. Then he said, *"Meera, it's just as if we are in samādhi at this time. Can you feel it?"*

Then he declared this a special night of feasting so all the temple devotees could enjoy tasty foods offered first in worship, and then jointly shared in gratitude. Although nearly everyone had by now fallen asleep, there was nothing that could deter Baba from fulfilling a beautiful tradition.

He called Lachu's name with colourful adjectives about laziness, half-teasing, but finally coaxing poor Lachu to consciousness, and by and by, a thin tail of smoke could be seen rising from the *chulan*, the clay stove in the cooking area. We would be up the entire night.

Dattia, May 26, 1975

Baba brought us to Dattia for the anniversary of Gutaly Baba's death. It never occurred to me that Gutaly Baba could still be in Dattia a year after his *mahasamādhi* but he was here. I felt his presence. I heard him call my name when I bowed and touched my forehead to the earth at the shrine. I felt him smiling with delight that we had come and as I knelt to pay my respects to him at the step of his memorial *samādhi*, I felt that same bliss that I experienced in Chattarpur with Sarir Baba last year. I was filled with awe and gratitude to experience this living essence of my beloved Gutaly Baba.

The local villagers came quickly to welcome us but Baba had been delayed. He was performing a sacred rite out of view just below on the rocky slope ascending the Gutaly Baba memorial. Now he arrived softly, with everyone gathering together around him excitedly to be able to touch his feet.

Tonight we remain here on this hill, bathing at the bottom of the slope at a great well built by Parbhat Singh. I enjoy a rest in the night's cool breezes and the familiar sounds of jungle doves cooing - *Radha Krish*, just as they had done at Amarapura. The special peace of my Guru's dwelling place prevails.

May 29, 1975

We've moved down the hill to the shelter at the well. It is quiet. No one comes to this old ruin built at the edge of rocky desert hills. It consists of two small rooms and a miniature enclosed courtyard in cement now nicely overgrown with bushes and a lone dying tree. It also includes a small temple with a figurine that is worshipped periodically after the local Hindus have their bath.

To bathe here, one must fill a bucket from a long way down and carry it around the side of the shelter for the privacy of some other ruins where Gutaly Baba used to live many years ago.

After my bath, I come up the hill to pray at Baba's tomb. I feel him with me everywhere. This helps my efforts to purify my mind and heart so that I am worthy of living among saints.

The scriptures say: "*Sonch, Santosh, Tap, Suadyaya, Ishwara, Prani Dhyam.*"

Control these five *indriyas* – the mental faculties, and our *sadhana* or practice, can be successful. Without control of them, *sadhana* is impure.

Baba warns: *"Leave all your attachments. Do not have any money in America. Trust instead the bank of the Supreme."*



I asked about money for Gutaly Baba's samādhi and Baba said, *"Be poor. Poor is good."* Then he added: *"Do your work. Be a karma yogi. It is very difficult to control the mind. Do your renunciation or austerity practices. Pain is necessary. The mind projects, reminisces, regrets, envisions - but what is real? Only Ultimate Truth. Reality. Nothing else is permanent. So it can all be discarded."*

Baba gave a metaphor. *"The hook which controls the elephant is so small. As a symbol of 'control', compare it to the name of God (Truth). So small yet potent – it contains all. OM."*

May 30, 1975

By evening, before sunset, visitors begin to pour in from the town. News has spread that Baba is here. If we were more accessible to the town, they would no doubt be here in huge crowds.

I can hardly stir from the midday heat. The hot winds engulf and dry me. Eventually, I move for a drink and become involved in a gathering of visiting ladies shyly wrapped in their saris, who have come to meet me.

I am reluctant to be with them because they want to touch my feet but Baba requested them not to. Someone brings me flowers and I give them all away.

The ladies are astonished to hear me speak Hindi. They look like different coloured fish bathing in a small pool of water in which they dive and surface eagerly for food bits offered to them.

I sing with them and then hurry up the slope to visit the renowned snake that always lives beside Gutaly Baba's *dhuni*. There he is lying against the edge of the outer wall almost invisible, unless one knows where to look; a gray white loop blending with the plaster of the wall, immobile, as if he himself were deep in meditation. He does not seem to mind me sitting beside him and watching him for a long while. The heat is torturous.

June 2, 1975

It is a feast day - the last prayers of the week's scriptural reading, blowing of the conch, many important visitors including the Rena of Dattia, and all seem endeared to Baba because his love is so great.

Swami Gokaldas had victorious moments especially when Baba directed fifty rupees from the offerings brought this morning to be given to him for his chanting. He was like a schoolboy with a candy bar and wanted to spend it on *prasad* for everyone. But at the last minute he spent only ten. Baba had a good laugh!

Many ladies have come to prepare purism. They are fried in huge cauldrons. They also cook other vegetables like pumpkins and assorted fried foods, sweets, and crispy treats. I eat a normal quantity but all the fatty foods bring a resurgence of diarrhoea so that in the night I am forced to run many times out behind the ruins to find a private place.

People were sitting everywhere, even on the hills until very late as the cooking, serving, and chanting carried on, especially around the *samādhī* so they could revere our beloved saint.

June 6, 1975

Morning. No sun. The miracle of no sun in mid-summer. I'd left my metal fish-shaped hair barrettes at the refuge below. Tundan found them and Baba told me not to lose them. It rained a trickle! And then the hot sun emerged.

Soon we departed in a great train of beings with Baba in front - running! Down the mountain, running so fast no one could keep up with him. He looked like a deer! We were giggling with delight to witness our elderly divine eminence run down that rocky slope in the gathering heat, like a boy, leaving all the tall youths far behind him. Baba took not an extra breath but we were all heaving and gasping.

We arrived at Ram Bagh to learn that Bera Baba is on a mad rampage again, threatening to kill us, especially Baba, me and Pawanji. We are shocked and saddened. Baba wants me to be away, for safety. He is always mentioning Chattarpur. It is hot, hot, hot.

I imagine escaping to the Himalayas. Baba always used to warn me when I travel to be careful, discriminate the good souls from the bad, and to think of him, he is always with me.

"Ham tumhare, tum hamare. Koy farak nahin hey... I am yours, you are mine. There is no difference."

It is time to return to visit Mother and Dad. Duty to family. Also the heat is destroying me. I am very ill with a liver attack requiring an intravenous glucose injection from Dr Sarwal. By evening, a glorious rain. I ask permission of Baba to go. He asks, "Where?"

"To America."

Everyone was jolted and fell silent. Baba had wanted me to leave Ram Bagh because of heat, scorpions, suffering, and the threats of Bera Baba. This plan, too, he agreed with. In the evening prayers, Tundan was twice bitten by a scorpion. Raja sat sad and sombre. I too felt choked up. Chaubeji accused me of going off to forget them forever.

No, no, my beloved brothers. Forget thee? Never! And Baba will never leave me. He says, *"I am with you always, everywhere."*

June 8, 1975



I left Ram Bagh this morning. Prayed, sat at the dhuni, accepted rupee notes from all the devotees as farewell, left 100 for Baba, and sang my favourite chant, 'Neelum', while Chaube and Santosh arranged a bus. I was crying.

Baba's eyes were filled with compassion. He sang an inspired chant and rubbed my head with his great palm. He was standing on the well like a tall white stag, like a petal of a daisy, waving goodbye as the bus for Orai drove away. Baba knows if I will ever come back.

February 22, 1976

Almost nine months have passed. Today the bus from Orai pulls into Rath. I hurry inside the temple gate of Ram Bagh and run exuberantly into the sanctuary of the cloister to touch Baba's feet – he had been expecting us for two hours and the tea was cold from waiting!! Baba knows all. He asked for new photos of my parents, though I'd never mentioned having new photos with me.

During the evening puja, for a few moments, I felt the blissful presence of a towering figure of Christ and burst into a devotional song of Gandhiji:

*"Ram, O God, everything is from your loveliness
You have many names but they are all names of God."*

September 14, 1976

Baba always sends me away with a local expression: *"Chalo, jao yahan ki tahan!"* "Come on, get out, what point is there in hanging out here!"

Even when I only want to stay at Ram Bagh, he sends me to see this teacher and that teacher, to find someone who can speak to me in English, to find my Guru. Once, I was about to depart for Poona by train with Pawan to meet a famous guru named Rajneesh. Baba warned me: *"Never pay money for the Truth. It should be given at no cost."*

I was very eager to meet this teacher because he was fluent in English and had many western students. As soon as we arrived, I made an appointment with the teacher. When the secretary asked for a fee, though it was only five rupees, Baba's reminder rang in my ears and I left that place immediately.

Once Baba sent me to an exotic ashram in the wilds of Madhya Pradesh called Dhar Khundi. It was headed by a disciple of the Paramhansa in Chitrakoot and, therefore, a brother or spiritual cousin of Baba. To get there we had to travel with many connecting buses into the interior and finally, we had to walk on foot across a river that had washed out the road. From there we found the last bus, right to the door of the ashram.

This leg of the journey had the air of a fairy tale. There was no road, no town, no bus stop, and hardly anyone could give us directions where to go. But a beautiful antique bus appeared, with a coupe style bonnet and small windows. It was painted in bright pink and ocean blue with many baubles hanging in the windows giving it the air a school bus for kindergarten children but, indeed, it was the transport bus to the ashram.

It hurtled over the stubby fields, cross country, the way only an old diesel without 4-wheel drive could do. There was no road in sight but the driver obviously knew where he was going. And it was a long way, hours and hours of gears wrenching and grinding to traverse the hostile terrain.

We arrived at night, only two passengers and the driver. The ashramites were not that welcoming, perhaps because we were Westerners. Undaunted, I gratefully accepted a clean hut to sleep in while Pawan was lodged in a cave in the bush. I was told we would be able to see the Maharaj in the morning. Later, a message was sent with a cup of tea, something to eat, and instructions to report if I had any dreams that night.

I dreamt of Baba sitting at the *dhuni* and giving me a long discourse. None of the other temple residents from Ram Bagh appeared in the dream. I felt no fear

in that place. At 4 a.m., I awoke and meditated. Eventually, someone brought tea with some bananas. After eating, we wandered around to see the beauty of the ashram.

It was like a paradise, an oasis in the desert we had crossed on the pink bus. There was lush jungle, papaya groves, banana, pineapple and other fruit trees everywhere, bird calls and the sounds of waterfalls tumbling down rock escarpments that fed into neat gardens and shrines to flow downstream in a fast-running river running through the bush.

Peremptorily, we were summoned to the Maharaj's large, heavily furnished, air-conditioned reception room. In the towns, air-conditioning was quite a luxury, but to find it in this remote place was almost unthinkable.

The Maharaj sat on an oversized armchair, as he was rather overweight himself, wearing slick-looking Indian clothes. Even indoors, he wore reflective sunglasses propped on his nose so that I could not even see his eyes. His greeting was perfunctory in perfect English. I felt immediate aversion to him but bowed respectfully, thanked him for his hospitality and explained why I had come there.

The Maharaj or Swami wasted no time asking me if I had dreamt anything during the night. When I reported my dream, he said, *"Take the next bus back to town. Baba is your Guru. No point in remaining here."* I was utterly stunned at the hasty invitation to leave, but very happy to receive a sign that what I knew intuitively was true.

September 17, 1976

What a blessing to return here to Baba's temple, humbly begging his leave to stay. He asks me about the Dhar Khundi 'wallah', the 'one in charge of the ashram' – as if he doesn't know – but he knows. *"How was the Dhar Khundi wallah? Didn't you like the beautiful place?"*

Then I repeated to Baba the Swami's words, that whoever was in my dream, that was my guru. As he listens, Baba has that knowing smile on his face. On my hands and knees, I bow with so much gratitude to be able to return, saying,

"Please, Baba, please, you are my Guru, there is no other".

And he laughs, and asks me, *"What do you want from your 'poor Baba'? There is nothing here. I don't know anything. I am just a poor Baba"*.

After some time, sitting silently at the *dhuni*, listening to the flames crackle and smelling the old familiar smells, Baba almost whispers, *"This is a Himalaya. Everything you need is here."*

He lets me stay – until he sees the time for me to go again, for there will be more to learn.

Babaji says, *"It's easy to be a saint living here in this temple. If you really want to be a saint, go live in New York City."*

इंगे लवता

5. I LOVE EVERYONE THE SAME

November 12th, 1985 – 12 year anniversary of my discipleship with Babaji

I'm returning to Ram Bagh, having come down from Nepal to see my Baba. This time it is easier, flying the longer part, and coming by bus and train from Delhi in a pleasant season. It is very quiet and connections are good allowing me to arrive on the same day right up to Baba's feet!

There, as *darshan* is fulfilled, I become a river of tears; for all my sins and weaknesses since I last came, and all the sorrows of my parents, for the long years away and the lonely road I tread. I settle in and feel completely welcomed as one of the family.

That very night, as the disciples sat at Baba's *dhuni* to worship, there came one ugly and wicked-looking character. He was so tall he had to lean down to get through the doorway into the *dhuni* chamber with his shiny double-barrelled rifle and very long moustache. Balancing the rifle against the wall, he dropped down on his knees and fell in a heap on the floor bowing at Baba's feet.

For a moment, he seemed transformed and soft, kneeling beside Baba and I was glad that he knew enough to give Baba due respect leaving aside his weapon. But I was surprised that Baba greeted this dangerous-looking man with

so much love, affection and attention, slapping him on the back just as he had done to me when I'd returned from my journey.

Then the man stood up again, towering over us with his wide shoulders and giant feet. We were already so crowded in together, there was no apparent space for him to sit down and no one moved aside.

This did not deter him - he was obviously intent on joining us and finding a space for himself. I hoped against hope he would *not* sit next to me, as I'd already decided that he was a person of low character. No sooner had this unfriendly thought crossed my mind than he proceeded to squeeze himself in right beside me, pushing one devotee well into another and crushing his knee against mine.

I pulled myself away as much as I could in a polite but subtly hostile manner. A stream of unfriendly thoughts continued to simmer in my mind: How can Baba love such a degenerate looking man? He must be a dacoit, carrying around such a dangerous weapon. He doesn't deserve Baba's love! This silently implied, of course, that I did!

At that very moment, Baba spoke. He seemed to be addressing everyone, though he looked at no one in particular, and he spoke these words emphatically: *"I love everyone the same. All are one to me."*

His words stung me. Immediately, I realised the gravity of my error. Out of fear and judgment, I had made of this man a devil, not knowing the state of his heart. Even if he were an evil sort, are we not all worthy of Baba's divine love, compassion and forgiveness?

The deepest movement took place in me at that moment. I rested and relaxed myself beside the newcomer and recognised him as my brother, feeling profound remorse, shame, and gratitude for Baba's teaching.

Rath, November 16th, 1985

I am sitting at Baba's feet in Ram Bagh. It is five years of struggle since I was last here. But I have been here all the time. I never left, really, from deep within myself. My mind has been flying here again and again. I don't know how it is possible but it was my true experience. Perhaps I left some intrinsic part of myself here in Baba's care and rushed back into the world. And now, returning here, I

find it again, that lost part of myself without which I tumbled into unnecessary folly and sorrow.

Here with Baba, I retrieve my innocence, my strength and my faith. If I go again from here, I must dedicate all my force into maintaining these inexorably. I must be, will be, brave. Alone, a tigress in the jungle of this modern age, I must never lose hope. But who will remind me in the traumas of my daily mind. Who will guide me to sustain myself, my hope, my compassionate love? Baba's love itself.

Baba says: *"Do renunciation. If you renounce the world, you will have mantra and samādhi."*

"Don't worry about money, money is nothing."

"Love is everything. I am yours and you are mine."

"Don't want anything. All is temporary. All is the magic play of Krishna, the flute player."

"Control your eyes, your eyes will look unguided, unguarded. You must restrain them. Control your mind. Hold it. Control it. Remain on a high level, virtuous."

"Remain oblivious, unchanged by winds and things of the world."

"Keep the company of saints. I am nothing. There is nothing here for you."

"Your bank account is here. You need nothing else."

One of the disciples suggested that we all go in a group to Dattia for pilgrimage. Those present became enthusiastic about the idea and the call "chalo" was heard many times. "Let's go." Then he said to Baba, "Come on, Baba."

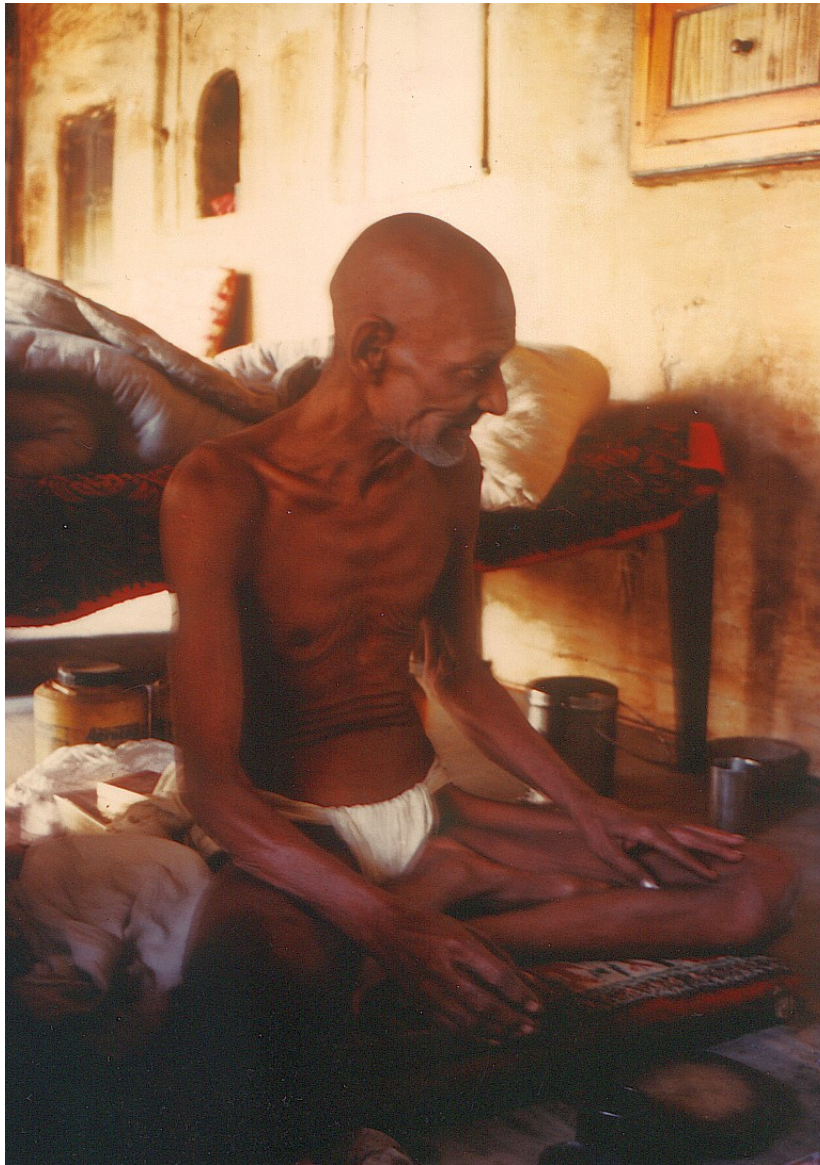
And Baba said, laughingly, *"Where are we going? Everything is here."*

Understanding dawned in all of us at that moment. We laughed deeply. No need to go anywhere.

Baba told me: *"Keep the company of saints."*

But where in the world are saints to be found as in Ram Bagh?

Baba exclaims: "Be God's servant".



Shyam Sunder translates Baba's power for me:
"Only serve Him, Krishna, or however you name Him. Serve no one else..."

As Shyam Sunder speaks, Baba is looking through my very being with his eyes wide, *"I am always with you, am I not?"* he asked.

And I realised, Yes. He continues to teach: *"Is it not enough then? Never doubt. Have no doubts. God always fulfils the desires of his disciples. God listens - but it may take some time."*

Baba was building a school for orphans next to the ashram for which I had brought a large donation.

"You think you are doing so many things. You are giving money to the poor or doing projects, or achieving great things. You are doing nothing. Baba (as spiritual guide) is doing everything. Why do you think that you are doing something?"

Baba is present, past and future. But actually, Baba (referring to himself) "knows nothing."

Then he asks Shyam Sunder to explain to him what it is that I want, after already teaching me the way, bits of the path and the type of service I must do!

I had a camera with me. Shyam Sunder translates what Baba says: "If you take a picture, it is for divine use only."

"You want many schools and other projects, not just one school at Baba's ashram. You say one school is not enough. But how can you build one school even if you cannot serve God? How can you expect to properly serve others?

"First you must purify yourself, first you must achieve God, only then will you have the power to help others. That power only Baba can give you. He has a direct connection to God."

"Do not look at different books or follow other paths. You will only get confused and have to start all over again. If you are following the path, and one man says, go this way, while another says, go that way, what will you do? If you follow their advice, you will surely lose the correct path. So do not allow yourself to be misguided."

"If you attend a school regularly, you can be a better student. If you want to realize the Supreme, then you must get guidance. How can Baba guide you well when you do not receive his guidance regularly? You are busy in the world and you do not receive his proper guidance. Therefore, you should leave everything and serve Baba if you want to realize holiness.

"If you want to help your Mother and Father, God alone can help them. That is his work. You can do nothing unless and until He calls you." Don't worry about anything. Everything will happen. The Himalayas are here. This dhuni is a Himalaya."

"Be a saint. Remember Him always." If you follow Maya, your way will always be filled with thorns. If you follow Him, your way will be flowers, flowers."

"Why should you worry? What is there in money for you? Nothing. When you go from here, what will you take with you? Nothing. What am I wearing? Only this. Just this body. This too I will not take with me."

"People think they are the body and will be born again and again. He who understands one Reality is not reborn on this earth but that knowledge never dies. There are twenty-three elements of nature: these are always changing. But that Reality does not change."

"Research your own experience. Pleasure and pain are equal. Self is Guru! Divine light will extinguish all doubt."

"Three levels of guna, quality, arise in the heart: tamas (coarse), rajas (active) and sattva (pure, refined). Always keep a record of them and be aware of what is in your heart. Try to transform everything into sattva guna, the Pure."

"There are three things (four in the sutras) that are very important: Purity within and, without; peacefulness - unity, service; and knowledge (spiritual power). These are central to one's practice."

Baba scolds me. *"Why do you worry? I am yours and you are mine."*

This is very much the flavor of the Tibetan teachings about the relationship of the Guru to his/her pupil.

One evening I stand with Baba's followers chanting *arti* hymns. I am about to go to my room to retrieve a special incense that I want to light for Baba. In my mind I hear his voice calling me. *"Where are you going?"* he asks.

And as I kneel at the *dhuni* he throws me a box of incense sticks. "Yes," he says, *"Baba knows everything. Why do you doubt it?"*

Baba knows my mind even when I am far from Him.

Kathmandu, December 21st, 1985

This morning I began my pilgrimage to India for another visit to my beloved, Kappali Baba. Rising early, worship, reflection, bathing, packing and listening to hymns. As soon as the plane touched down in Khadjuraho, I began to relax though I felt the eager momentum to reach Baba pressing on me.

The bus stopped in Mauranipur. It was here that Baba fished me into his presence thirteen years ago from the great sea of *samsara*. All the Kaushik family were present, Ravi, Baba's instrument to meet me and bring me to his village, his brothers – Mahindra and Kavi, and their children, and they remembered me well. I was warmly invited to stay. No, I cannot be distracted from my goal to see Baba. I must be one-centred, one-pointed.

I reached Ram Bagh early the following morning at 11:00 just in time to hear the last of the morning prayers. Seeing him, Baba's aspect - so pure. I kept silent. I was simply smiling.

"Atman is everywhere. We are one. Again, Baba reminded me, "Leave everything; all is futile. God is love. Love is God." "When others do not understand you, you must understand that they do not understand. That is all you can do. That is enough."

When the *dhuni* was clear of visitors, I pulled out all the rupees I had brought with me to offer Baba. Since this area of Bundeilkhand is renowned for its dacoits and I was travelling alone, I had stuffed rupee notes by the thousand in my shoes and padded the inside of my clothing. I fussed with the bills thinking to leave myself just a little more than needed for the continuation of my trip and my return to Nepal.

Suddenly it seemed so insignificant. I wanted to give more, and even then it would not be enough. All morning, Baba spoke of incidents related to devotees bringing offerings, 1001 from a recently married devotee and others. He had never done this before. Never mentioned what offerings people brought.

I felt what I had brought was so small. Ten times as much I should have given. But it shall be. He knows that I ponder the worth or lack of what I bring for him. I need not worry. It is through him there is the offering, and he receives it. This I know.

Baba repeated what he had told me many times. *"Meera, this is (I am) a poor Baba, your poor Baba!"*

After he was shaved and bathed, a special ash was applied on his forehead and eyes. He practiced some *sadhana* bowing at the shrines and performing traditional rituals and chants. After he had returned to the *dhuni*, I placed my offerings along with a small flashlight at his feet.

Baba only acknowledged the flashlight. His every gesture is a teaching so I was aware of the omission.

During puja, I saw the beam of a light against the temple walls. I thought it was Baba's large flashlight, so bright was the light in the shadows. When he walked right up to me in the darkness and made circular movements in the air with the

torch shining in his hand, I saw that the face of the light was green. Baba smiled and asked me if it was my torch, though he obviously knew, and this is part of his *leela* - divine play.

The money meant nothing. Again he was teaching me: *"Pay attention to the light, even if it comes in a small form and is insignificant looking. Treasure and follow what you know to be true."*

Perhaps Baba is my 'small form' compared to the great and famous Gurus the world over, and the light emanating from him is as great if not more. For me it is all. It illuminates the way.

December 24th, 1985

I am sitting with Raja Baba and learning some scripture. The themes were discrimination between what is Truth and not Truth, *vivek* and *vairagya*; and asceticism or renunciation, the two kinds of practice. Key words: attachment to worldly desires, patient endurance, the peaceful heart, controlling passions and sense control, equanimity, resolving doubts... from the Bhagvad Gita, Chapter 2, verse 18.

Amar came to pay his respects. Baba tried to encourage him, to wean him away from his drinking habit. He was unemployed and directionless in life. *"If you love anything, you should not fear society. God is omniscient so nothing can be hidden from Him. And no need to hide from men. Why fear them?"*

In the afternoon, I sat on the porch of the room behind the *dhuni* from where I could see Baba's back and the devotees attending him. I was quietly copying a verse from the Ramayana into my *bhajan* book where I wrote all the chants I'd learned in Devanagiri script.

Suddenly the feeling came over me to write something else on a blank page. I listened from my heart, not from thought, and these lines came to me. As I wrote them, I realised that Baba was dictating in English which he does not know at all. My pen flew across the page of its own volition. It was very exciting.

*"I am the wind and the storm
The tempest in the sky.
I open the door with one gust
And fill the room with flames.*



*I am everywhere.
I am the dhuni and the fire in it.
I am the last coal.
I am your heart and I fill it.
I am your last goal.*

*Seek and you can find me.
Tell me about love,
Where is it?
Atman prem, Universal Love.
Can you give that full and open
love
In which you die completely.*

*I am the door to your heart
And the entrance to your mind.
I am your thoughts and the
thinker.
Your devotion and your desire.*

*I am the mist on the fields
And the rain in the morning.
I am the pilgrim bathing in the cold river
The bird's shriek and the wind howling.
The divine hears you.
Now on your lips forever keep the holy names.
Weep to God
Make all your tears and sorrows into prayers
Let only that one sound reside in your heart."*

These words describe what happens at the *dhuni*, the dialogues of the heart with Baba and the sounds of nature coming through the great black wooden doors. I heard these messages in my heart and rushed to Raja Baba's side to read it to him. He listened patiently. I told him this came directly from Baba. Still my ego must have been soaring slightly.

Then I went to sit near Baba at the *dhuni* with my book in hand.

Responding to the verses I had 'copied' and read to Raja Baba, and seeing right through me, Baba gently said, "Now write it on your heart!"

I was stunned. It was so direct. Indeed it hit the mark for it meant many things. It made my pride vanish. I had attached so much to the writing, the 'specialness' of it. But the verses were Baba's. I had done nothing. So I must always remember, give up attachment. I do nothing.

Often at the *dhuni*, there are people visiting and Babaji invites them to boil water and prepare tea so they can be refreshed. On one such occasion I learned a great lesson.

I had come in from my meditation and sat down at the *dhuni* to join them, hoping I might get a cup of the best chai in India from the Guru's hand. I was eager to partake of Baba's *prasad*. The pot came, and having just entered, I did not know if Baba had received it or not. I assumed he had. I poured a cup and passed it on. The next devotee who took it from my hand immediately offered it to Baba first. I was mortified.

Baba said, "No you first." And the *chela*, accepted.

It was a great gesture. I realised how wrong I had been not even to offer first to him. I am so ignorant, not even offering to the Master. I must never expect or pretend that I could know Baba's answer, that he would or would not accept. What is most important is to offer anyway, out of respect.

I must in fact, offer anything I have, or receive, or prepare, just offer it to Him – first. It is automatically blessed in that act of surrender. Whether Baba takes it physically or not, whether he accepts it or not, is immaterial. The very act of offering is a devotion itself and brings blessings.

December 25th, 1985

I plan to leave Ram Bagh for South India to visit Sai Baba's ashram. I was inspired to go by our project receptionist, Limbuji. He's a very little man, almost a dwarf, but huge in spiritual proportions, by the fact of his humility and selflessness.

A few weeks ago, Limbuji had introduced me to the Sai devotees in Kathmandu, including Mr. Dey from whom I learned about the Sai village adoption program in which six thousand villages are receiving assistance to

improve their standard of living. He also shared the miraculous healing that his wife received from Sai Baba during her battle with cancer and her awakening experience at the time of death.

From this grew an urge to meet Sai Baba himself. I hoped I might even see him in a dream. One night, I dreamt that I was with many of his devotees but he never appeared. I saw a locket on a devotee's neck and rushed over to have a look, certain that I would see a photo of Sai Baba inside it.

The face I saw was not that of Sai Baba but of Hanumanji, defender of the Good, with a rather fierce and powerful expression and his tail elevated behind him. In two other dreams, I was only able to see his feet. All the Sai devotees told me what a great thing it was, the feet being the highest. I could not pacify my doubts about this. That morning Baba instructed me,

"It's all in the feet. Yes, Meera, it's all in the feet."

He knew! How could he know! And he chuckled profusely, so much so that the sounds of his knowing laughter reverberated throughout the temple cloister. I had not understood the full extent of his powers until I reflected on this.

I wanted to make offerings but I knew he wanted nothing from me. How could I show my gratitude and devotion? Perhaps a special offering of flowers. There were hardly any to be found and those in the garden were needed for *puja*.

I wandered to the back of the garden where a giant *neem* tree spread its munificent shade. Suddenly I spotted some exquisite pink flowers sprouting from its topmost branches. These would be very beautiful to offer.

I knew Mukian never used them for the *puja* because they were so inaccessible. What made me think I would be able to reach them? I had no other choice. And I would have to try.

Approaching the tree, I studied it from all sides for a way up but the lower limbs looked too thin to support my weight. The thick growth did not lend itself to finding any foothold. Just then, Baba called me from the *dhuni* and I ran inside. He asked me to do *seva*, to rub his feet. This was considered a great honour and unusual privilege.

Afterwards, I felt an even stronger urge to gather those beautiful flowers for him and returned again to the *neem* tree. I felt certain if Baba rewarded me just for trying, then surely if I exerted greater determination, he would help me again.

The task looked more impossible than before and I was growing discouraged when a young boy appeared in the garden. There was usually no one around at this hour, it being midday, rest time. The lad seemed to know that I needed help and asked me what he could do. Later, I thought he must 'be' Baba, or else he was a messenger sent by him.

The lad easily climbed up into the tree and picked four beautiful pink blooms from the high branches. I was beaming as he clambered down and handed them to me, almost disbelieving that they were real.

I rushed to the *dhuni* chambers and offered the four rare flowers to Baba. He said: "*Not everyone can understand.*"

This puzzled me. What had appeared to be impossible was accomplished through my persistent effort and the purity of my intention – or so I thought! And these, I felt, called forth Baba's help.

But, actually, the offering was not pure. Although Baba had accepted the flowers, I began to feel that they were not really from me because they had been picked by the lad. I did not pick them myself.

Next day I determined that I would go out again, and find a way to pick flowers for Baba with my own hands. I looked up into the foliage overhead, but hardly any blooms remained. Undeterred, I grabbed hold of the nearest limb and tried to hoist myself up onto it, succeeding only in entangling the folds of my sari in the network of small branches. I could not ascend.

Finally, at the perimeter of the garden, I saw a way. There hung an impressive branch, gnarled with age, and arched lazily above the field. Below it was a deep irrigation ditch, dried out but full of rocks. I could lean on it to support me from falling into the ditch – a bit precariously – but I persevered, perspiring with every gram of energy in my bones.

I had just enough strength to pull the branch towards me until three priceless flowers came into my reach. It felt right to exert and sweat and endanger myself for this 'cause'. I would be able to offer Baba a truer gift. And in doing this, I saw

that this would be a theme for my entire spiritual path – I would have to rely on myself to reach the goal.

At last, I broke the flowers off very carefully, a prayer on each breath, and let go the branch. I felt very tired but deeply enriched with these treasures, too weary to be proud, which was a good thing. And so, quite humbled and spent, I



arrived at the *dhuni* and fell on my knees.

I was out of breath as I fell to the floor, bowed, and presented the lovely flowers to Babaji. He received them but said nothing. After a long moment, he balanced them atop the *trilojan* that stood above the *dhuni* and sat back, admiring them with a loving smile. His face beamed like the sun rising over us in a winter sky. A great peace overcame me.

A few moments later, Baba called me close to him and showed me his head. I could not believe at first what he meant, but it was as I thought. He wanted me to rub his head.

In all the thirteen years that I had been his disciple, I had never been allowed to rub or even touch Baba's head. I bent over him, and for a few sacred moments, kept my palms tenderly on his tiny scalp. Then abruptly, Baba dismissed me with kind intonations.

I felt such a happiness, a fullness of being and a deep sense of purification. It was as if I had touched the sun itself and carried that blue flame of its power within me. The flowers had been offered. Baba had rewarded me profusely; he had helped me succeed in the truest way.

And so he will help me with my *Dharma* work.

Babaji always used to say:

*"The work does not get done but they say they are doing it.
The way is winding, do not dance,
I have no knowledge - but act as if and say that I do.
Be happy, be happy in every situation
Welcome all and be detached, leave everything (be far from it all)."*

He wanted me to renounce but he knew I was not quite ready.

Thursday, December 26th, 1985

That morning we were singing and chanting at *puja*. Everyone was making a sound with one of the instruments. I took up the little *manjeera*. But the *puja* lasted for such a long time that my arms began to ache unbearably. I could no longer play them.

Then I spotted Baba moving through the worshippers and wished that the pain would abate so that I could do him the proper honour and play well. The very next breath, a tall devotee reached out and took the instruments from my hands to relieve me. Again I realised how subtle is Baba's love.

It was to be my last evening with Baba at the *dhuni*. When tea was ready, Baba's cup would be filled. He would sip from it and pass it to me. I sipped and handed it back to Baba. He, in turn, drank again and returned it to me to finish. I drank, washed the cup and saucer and brought it clean and shining to Baba.

Likewise, I take his teaching. I practise. He teaches more. I practise further seeking to purify myself more and more until I can become clear, shining and clean within, like the cup I have washed and offered. May I wash from within and return to Baba to offer my life.

Through these demonstrations, Baba was teaching the other devotees a transcendent love that dissolved caste and social convention, even the powerful taboo of not sharing eating vessels. We were drinking from the divine cup, imbibing the knowledge of Truth.

I wished to perform a small *puja* at all the shrines, but I was not sure how many sticks of incense to light and how to light them. Naturally, Baba read my mind and demonstrated how one should properly light incense right there at the *dhuni*.

He pulled two incense sticks from a packet and held them in his hand. Then, very mindfully, he struck a match and touched the flame to their tips, making certain as he did so that I was taking note. I watched attentively and with awe. Who is this beautiful soul?

I learned another lesson during *arti* but it went forgotten. Perhaps that is a lesson in itself. That I really only learn the teaching that I can remember.

Friday, December 27th, 1985

It was 3:30 a.m. I awoke thinking it would be my last day. Everything was packed but why must I leave? I could not be away from the *dhuni*. My heart cried. After all the prayers, I had to administer the holy water to myself, something which I had never done. But then Baba came and performed his puja. He called me to the front of the shrine where the beautiful image of Krishna stood watching the world and declared "*Leyho, here, take.*"

Baba was chanting mantras as I knelt before him with my cupped hands outstretched. He poured the holy water into my hands, the blessed water full of his love. It was something Baba had never done. For me, this was an act of pure compassion. And just after I had been alone taking the water, it symbolised again his constant support to me, his presence with me everywhere. May it be so in my life. And he knew, though I did not, that I would not leave today. I could not go.

Saturday, December 28th, 1985

Again I thought I would leave and waited for Baba to give me a sign. I bathed and got ready to go but was delayed again. Babaji had been sick with diarrhea in the night. I could not possibly go knowing that he was unwell. All I wanted was to be near so that I could help take care of him. So I stayed until he recovered.

The devotees had cleaned Baba's soiled quilt and bed sheets. When I came to cover his *charpai*, I saw that the bedding was not properly cleaned, by my standards! So I carried all the bedding out to the well.

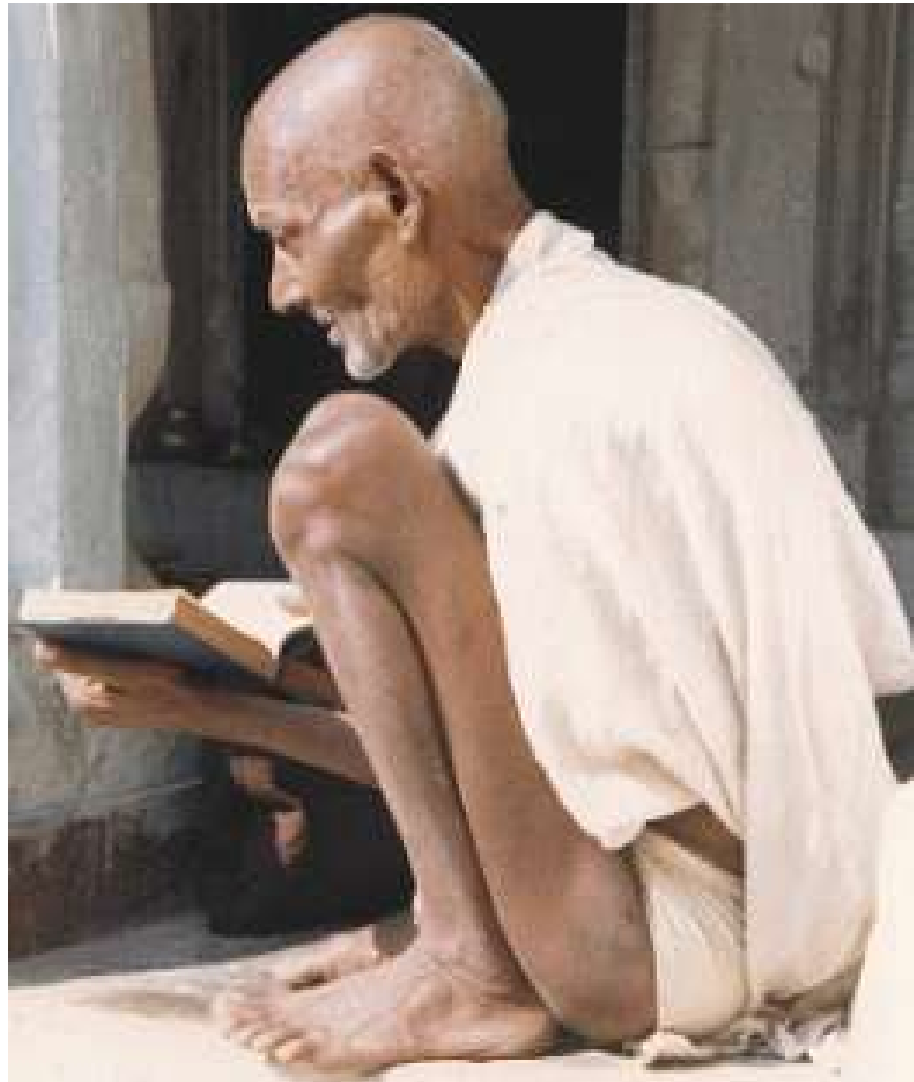
It was heavy and cumbersome. I drew bucket after bucket of water, washed the bedcover and blanket and laid them out to dry in the sun on the stone floor of the temple. Then I carried them to the cloister and sat on the ground trying to

remove some of the stains, brushing them with the best implement I could find – my toothbrush. I felt such love for Baba while doing this.

As I sat working, I reflected that for me his body waste is as holy as food. Baba came out to the cloister and sat directly in the warmth of the sunny alcove. He squatted in the sun holding an ancient tome in his hands, reading from the scriptures. From time to time, he looked over to watch me scrub his bedding. I was overcome with emotion.

After a while,
Baba said,
*“Meera, why go
to so much
trouble?”*

He knew. There was no need for me to answer. This was a joy for me, to be able to serve and work in this way. And it was a teaching – with my living teacher sitting there before me! Just as I clean his bedding until all the stains are out, so I must clean my heart completely,



I asked Baba if I could take his photo. I have that photograph to this day: Babaji sitting and reading scripture.

December 30th, 1985

It was my last morning at Ram Bagh. Day after day I had thought I was leaving and could not, so by now, I had adopted a posture of internal surrender. I would plan nothing as a matter of will, neither leaving nor staying on. I would patiently await Baba's instructions and accept His word as grace. I would wait for the understanding to ripen within whether it was time to go.

A group of us sat drinking tea at the *dhuni*. Ravi was there from Mauranipur. Some days earlier, I had shown Baba my card from work with my name and address in Nepal. Now he asked Ravi to take one card from me in case of need.

In fact, not 6 weeks later, when Baba was in hospital, Ravi used that card to send me a telegram. Baba told me that I was his daughter in a previous life in India and that we had this karma together in this life.

"*She is my true daughter,*" he told Ravi. I felt so blessed.

As the morning elapsed and the temple buildings absorbed the warmth of the sun, the devotees had, one by one, left Baba to return to Rath, to their farms, or to take up their duties in the temple itself. When the cups were all emptied, I carried them out to the cloister as I had done so many times before to wash them next to the small water tank outside the *darwar*.

I squatted in the sunlight and rinsed the chipped cups and saucers very slowly and thoughtfully, with the joy of knowing that Baba was still only a few feet away. When I finished, I set the tea things out to dry in the sun and returned to sit beside the *dhuni*.

Baba was there alone now, very reflective and tall-looking like an ancient prince. He was completely silent and aware. I knew he could see right through my heart and I sat with this knowledge very peacefully opposite him tending the *dhuni* fire.

Suddenly Baba called me to him. He asked me to come and sit right in front of him. "*Auw, auw, Come, come,*" he encouraged me softly. I did not hesitate for a moment. But I was curious as this was something entirely new.

He took my head in his hands and leaned his body very close to mine until his head was just next to mine. Then, to my complete surprise, Baba kissed me on

the forehead. It was not a kiss of passion or anything like that. It was just a touch, a tender innocent contact, a benevolence of blessing and pure love.

The *dhuni* was open to the cloister and devotees could wander in quite freely at any time. If they had found Baba kissing me, it would have caused quite a stir and, no doubt, a lot of misunderstanding.

In that moment, my mind passed into a state of complete emptiness. It was as if I had ceased to exist and my memory fell into an abyss of unconsciousness, a gap of the unknown. I was not aware of my body or his body, no sense of any contact, any comfort, discomfort or knowledge of the world around me. I did not feel my breath or his breath or even the touch of his lips, though I know they had landed fully upon me forehead. I had passed to another dimension.

When Baba drew away, I opened my eyes. There he sat, his eyes smiling with a radiance that was beautiful. Then he told me in his fatherly way, sharp but affectionate, "*Bhagao, get out, go.*"

I wandered out slightly dazed, sat down in the terrace of the cloister, and leaned against a wall beside the Hanuman shrine. The sound of voices now drifted towards me from the *dhuni* area. Raja Baba had come to attend to Baba and Mukian joined them a few minutes later.

While sitting there alone, I tried to recapture what had happened. My critical mind and my worldly conditioning as a mortal, western female soon joined forces and rose in assault. What did this mean? Was Baba like so many other gurus that had fallen from their pedestals?

Then the voice of devotion and faith protested adamantly, "NO, way!! It could not be. I would not let such a thing happen. I would run away." Then the voice of love and unshakeable faith declared, "I trust Baba completely. He would never ask of me or do anything with me that was improper. It was a kiss of pure love. Nothing short of..."

To me Baba had always been the embodiment of pure love and wisdom. Did he have feet of clay? There had been many a charlatan who had crossed my path during the years in India and beyond. And I had known well the sting of betrayal. But how could I bear the suffering of a loss of this magnitude?

I sobbed quietly as these voices raged and struggled within me. There in the heat of the cloister, overtaken with doubt, I suffered a crisis of faith and despair and fervently prayed that it was not true, that my Baba was worthy of my devotion and not a misguided man. Finally I realised that I could not know the Truth without asking him directly.

I returned to the *dhuni*, bowed to Baba and sat down. Everything seemed just as always – here I was again in the sacred silence at the feet of God's servant, with Raja Baba, Mukian and Mitoolal. Quite unexpectedly, Baba began to address us in a mood both convivial and devout, pronouncing how, just a few moments ago, he had embraced and kissed me.

With waves of ingenuous laughter, almost as if he himself was surprised at what had transpired, Baba reenacted our embrace by folding his arms around his shoulders and waving in my direction. "*Hah, leyho, he said, Yes, there it was, I put my arms around Meera...*" and he made puckering sounds to simulate kissing. We all giggled like embarrassed children. And I saw their astonished faces. I myself still felt quite amazed by Baba's candour.

Then, he leaned over and asked me to come close. I thought he would kiss me again now in front of everyone as if to confirm it. Later I felt deep remorse for having allowed even a single doubt about Baba to take over my mind. At that moment, he reached over, took the corner of my shawl and wrapped a one rupee coin in it. Then he tied a knot around the coin with the cloth to secure it, intoning a chant all the while.

I was puzzled. Later Raja Baba explained to me that this was the traditional act of a father when he sends his daughter to the house of the father-in-law to be.

"*Tum hamare, ham tumhare, hamara bittiya hai*, You are mine I am yours. You are my very own daughter."

It was a phrase that seemed so familiar to me. And to the others he avowed, "*She is my very own little daughter.*" Years ago, he had told me that in a previous birth (two before this life) I was indeed his daughter in India itself.

Baba rose and walked out to the cloister. We all followed as he beckoned us. Raja Baba then explained what Baba had said he would do, and told me not to be afraid. This too was a blessing that he was conferring on me because it was a

special time and Baba was sending me away - the ritual a father performs in parting from his beloved daughter.

Baba grabbed my two arms while the others looked on. He dropped me down until I was lying flat on the ground to his left. Then he leaned his whole body over mine for a moment as if to shield me from all the forces of the world with his own energy. Next he quickly pulled me up again, continuing to hold both my hands in his. I felt like a small leaf, a mere flag in the wind. He moved me about as if I were weightless.

As soon as I was standing again, Baba pulled me with his arms this time to his right side until I fell gently to the ground and was again lying flat on my back. And he leaned himself over me a second time like a giant tree casting its shade over the earth beneath it and all the small plants and animals taking shelter there. After a moment, he brought me back upright to a standing position and rubbed my head with his hands.

I had not even time to bow when Baba disappeared inside the *darwar*, leaving me perplexed and reeling somewhat from the experience. Raja Baba again, in the kindest way, repeated that Baba had shown enormous love for me with these ritual actions, the love of a father sending his treasured daughter away and never seeing her again. Indeed, I actually left Ram Bagh a few moments later. And I never saw Baba again.

This had been the last *darshan*. Baba would have known he would soon die. And I was to go to the house of my 'father-in-law', the Buddha.

इंगे लवटा

6. DEATH OF A SAINT

Wednesday, February 5th, 1986

I had a vivid dream about Baba around 4 a.m. It was, in fact, the time I should have been awake meditating. By the time I awoke I had nearly forgotten the dream. It was morning in darkness. I was seated with Baba and Raja Baba around the *dhuni*. Some other disciple was there but he was nameless in the dream. They were passing the chelum but by the time it reached me it was already out. Baba's Prasad.

We were in good humour together, very relaxed and tranquil. Much affectionate feeling. Then Baba took to eating, and I observed quietly, watching the glow of his forehead. He did not speak to me directly in the dream. The last thing I saw, the *dhuni* chelum dropped and broke. I awoke in a state of fear.

Baba died on Friday, February 7, two days later. He was, in fact, on the night of that dream, in hospital in Lucknow, mortally wounded and being attended to by Raja Baba, Mukian and a few close disciples.

February 8th, 1986

Though visiting other religious places of meditation in Kathmandu, I could find no other teacher like Baba. I only wanted to see my Baba, no one else. But regarding my practice, I would go to the Sayadaw's temple to get advice from

Bhante, the head monk. He became my Buddhist teacher. He helped me to realise my error while meditating and having visions and curiosity about them, trying to see them better. I should have just observed the image and noted my curiosity.

February 10th, 1986

At 12 p.m. a telegram reached me in the project office calling me to Lucknow where Baba had been admitted to King George Medical College. It had actually arrived on Saturday but my UN manager delayed giving it to me due thinking it was not important – and it was the weekend. I later saw that he was an alcoholic.

Everything had to be done to get a visa, travel letter, tickets, foreign money. I was not at all prepared. It was pouring rain. There was no one in the UN office to help me but Limbuji at the front desk. He was a devotee of Sai Baba, a true *Dharma* brother. The process to get things ready was underway but the visa for India would be slow. As the time evaporated, I knew I would be too late.

February 12th, 1986

I flew to India and went first to the Lucknow to the Medical College. No one knew anything about Baba. I searched every ward, every admission since February 6th but could find no trace. I had no idea what had happened. Then I travelled to Rath arriving at 6:20 p.m. at Ram Bagh on the Orai bus.

It was just sunset on a cloudy cool day. The passengers on the bus had all wondered about me, my blue luggage and my destination. First they assumed that I was a mission person from Canada going to Rath. One young man was sure I was going to Baba. I showed him Kappali Baba's photo.

The bus laboured on between lush fields of wheat, lentils, gram and mustard. A true green, fresh emerald light, restful to the eyes, a peace, pervaded the fields that unfolded towards Baba temple like a sari, the endless sari of Draupadi. She was attacked - but as her captor grabbed her sari and tried to pull it from her body, Krishna added endless metres of cloth to it and the attack was foiled.

I entered the temple compound as quietly as possible. Everything seemed the same. The black doors were hinged tight and warm human sounds issued forth

from behind them. I tucked my shoes in the crevice on the terrace. Devotees ran up to greet me, taking my bags.

I bowed entering into the *dhuni* chamber. But Baba was not there in his body. Instead, I found his cloths neatly folded on the *tukket* beside the *dhuni*. The bed cot was spread with a velvet blanket, dark red. A photo I had taken of Baba had been placed on the cloths right next to the *dhuni* facing us.

Kneeling down, I studied the photo. Baba looked so small. But where is he? He must be here. I wanted to believe he'd be coming in any minute. My mind stumbled. I could not accept it. How could it be? No one was crying. I felt my mind in my heart, a flood.



In spite of the harsh reality, a tranquil mood prevailed. The devotees were reminiscing and the *dhuni* burned with brilliance, eternity in flames of white ash. I joined my brothers there in the folds of their hearts and felt protected, warmed by their peace, strength and solidarity.

Later I bathed in the corner of the temple at the small well facing Baba's *samādhi* and cried. I had failed to pay attention to the prophetic dream of a few days ago and missed the opportunity to see Baba before he died.

I'd also neglected to take note of a direct portent that something was amiss. It was the strange phenomena that appeared in a photo I had taken of Baba during my last visit with him. When it was developed, I saw clearly that his arm was blurred out - the arm that was shot.

Although I knew it was an omen, a 'message' for me of some sort, I could not fathom what it meant. It disturbed me deeply. I asked Jane, Papa, anyone who knew anything about photography how that kind of distortion could occur only on one part of a film. It remained a mystery. How could I have known what it was to signify?

I had not prepared my visa and ticket to go to India though two strong intuitions came to do so, one during Jane's visit, another when our project meeting at UNICEF was called off. Suddenly February had opened up to me to visit for a few days. I was distracted and did not take the initiative.

On my last trip I left early to visit Sai Baba's temple in South India. Baba did not send me there? What was I looking for and how genuine was my faith to seek *darshan* elsewhere? Why could I not give Baba my restlessness, my curiosity? He would have looked after this impatient mind in the same way he has watched over me for so many years, sowing the seeds of my spiritual growth.

Baba had "called" me on Saturday, February 8th and on the evening of the 7th, and earlier, too, in my dream. My pending visit to see in March seemed a fair balance and to go so soon after my last visit felt greedy. All greed should be extinguished, I thought, and so I tried to quell my impatience to go back, and ignored the urge to sling a bag over my shoulder in search of Ram Bagh that Saturday morning.

If I had done so, I may not have reached there in time to have a last *darshan* but I could have been in time for the ceremony of his *mahasamādhi* when his body was installed in its tomb and sealed. Life is full of so many 'ifs'. 'If only this' and 'if only that'. 'If only' thoughts are unreal, untrue. The only Truth is now.

I returned to the *dhuni* where the photo of Baba sat, so small and innocuous – just where I always used to find him – overcome with emotion as the reality of his death broke through. All these thoughts and regrets about what I should have done in the past are of no use. Baba has gone away. It is as simple as that: In his words, "*Chaley gaya*," gone!

It was uplifting to see the activity of the *dhuni* continue, as always; the old men sat in a circle having cups of tea, a chelum. chants to Shankar, incantations and murmurings and stories about Guruji. So simple. so pure a being, all these men gathered in love for him are here.

And being with them, I feel his love presence and our connection. As Raja Baba said, "*We are like beads on a mala.*"

I closed my eyes in *dhyan*, meditation, at the *dhuni* and Baba was present. He really never went anywhere at all. Though I could not see him those last days, he would not want me to be troubled by all that had to pass in the hospital. Now I begin to understand a deeper meaning of the bond with one's Guru. I am speaking to Baba in my heart. He is with me.

Baba is not only a saint but a martyr as well. This is the ultimate saint. Baba stayed seven days after he was shot. On the seventh day he rested. The time it took to 'create' the world.

February 17th, 1986

Ravi came and visited all day. We spoke deeply about our Baba. He described moments alone with him in the hospital. I've had several accounts from devotees who remained with Baba till the last. From bits and pieces added to the main events that transpired came the following history:

On Tuesday evening, January 27th, just days before the shooting, Govind, the photographer, was with Baba. Baba told him,

"Saints should not remain long in this life. This body should be left." He was referring to his own body."

On Thursday, the Muslim bus driver, Hero, had argued with Baba who nearly expelled him verbally from the *dhuni*. Hero was drunk and very angry. He gave Baba a warning such as, "We'll see."

On Saturday night January 31st, Baba's disciples dispersed as usual around midnight. Lately, Baba had stopped taking the chelum, but at his last *darwar*, he joined in with his devotees.

At 12:30 a.m., Hero came again, this time armed and with an accomplice who was a local policeman!

The latch on the temple doors was drawn but they climbed over the walls and entered. Standing in his shoes on the *dhuni*, he first tried to choke Baba by putting a cloth in his mouth to prevent him from making a sound and then strangling him with his hands.

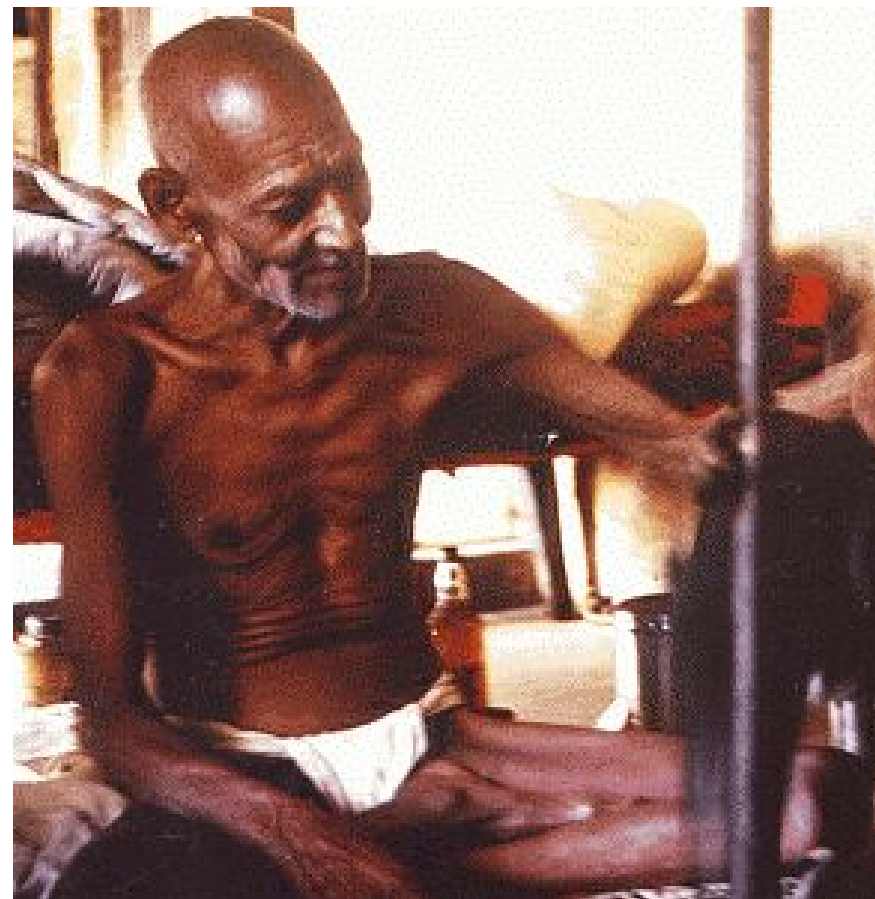
But Baba managed to cry out, "*Mukian, Mukian!*"

Mukian immediately got up and ran in from the cloister where he just prepared to sleep. He pulled the accomplice back and chased him out into the garden. Meanwhile, Hero tackled the cupboard door and broke the lock. As Baba rose from the bed, Hero took out his gun and shot Baba at point blank range. Then

he escaped, leaving Baba bleeding from his wound, and the sack of money still lying in the unlocked cupboard.

Baba sat at the *dhuni* with his left hand extended at his side. This was the position of the mysterious photo (below) that I later realised was prophetic. It pictures Baba seated at the *dhuni* with his left hand extended.

And in the very place he was shot,



the photograph is blurred. Behind and above that part of his arm was the stark red colour of his velvet bedcover.

By this time Raja Baba had come running and found him. Baba was calm and silent. He was smiling. He felt compassion for Hero and said of him,

"The poor driver, what will happen to him now?"

Raja and Mukian quickly bandaged Baba's arm and arranged to bring him to town. He lost a pint of blood at the *dhuni*. Dr Sarwal in Rath was summoned and he came and gave emergency treatment. Baba was then taken to the hospital in Rath.

The bullet was made of nine (some say sixteen) pieces - this multiplied the actual damage and made treatment more difficult. Two of the bullets were removed in Rath hospital.

The Superintendent of Police came and he himself drove Baba the several hours journey to Kanpur with a handful of devotees. On the way to Kanpur, everyone was weeping but after some time, Baba seemed to encourage them and bring them out of their sorrow.

The medical people at the Kanpur Hospital were on strike so they had to take Baba another two hours to Lucknow where he was admitted to the emergency clinic at King George's Medical College. They used the named Babu for his admission... hence I had been unable to locate him.

Baba was moved into the general medical ward but conditions were difficult. Dr Mahindra, reported that Baba lost another pint of blood during the all night drive from the hospital in Rath to the medical college in Lucknow. But the tests revealed that his blood level was normal and he needed no blood transfusion.

He was operated on to remove four more pieces of the bullet; three were left lodged in bones where they would do no harm. The doctors also tested his blood for liver function, thinking that since that with his lifestyle, the liver would be defective and administration of intravenous might create problems. Baba's liver was found to be quite normal and intravenous drip was applied. Many other medicines were also given.

The hospital was dirty and the staff did not take much interest in their work. Patient care, even for Baba, when he was first admitted to the general ward, was neglectful. Baba scolded the doctors and nurses, *"Doctors will do what?"*

According to Raja Baba, so potent were the smells and filth, it felt like hell. Finally, when Rani, a wealthy devotee arrived, Baba was moved to the isolation ward where she ordered the best possible treatment for him.

On the second day, he seemed much better and many of those who had come to be with Baba from Rath were sent home. Baba told them that he was fine and would return to Ram Bagh in a few days. Some devotees went back. Some remained and did rotating shifts to ensure that there was always an attendant present to care for Baba.

By Thursday he was feeling quite well. He was active and joking and the doctors were optimistic that he would walk the next day. Baba apparently was seen using his bandaged hand quite normally by Babu, a devotee from Rath, though at other times he nursed it as an injured limb.

On Monday, Baba was asked to send a telegram to me but he asked not to trouble me. Later Baba pressed Ravi to inform me and was relieved when Ravi confirmed that on Wednesday a telegram had been sent informing me that Baba was seriously ill but nothing else save the hospital name and location.

While Baba was in the first ward, in the next bed a man was dying of his injuries from a truck accident including six crushed ribs and severe head trauma. His wife had done some seva, service for Baba, helping to nurse him as much as she could. When the doctors had given up all hope for her husband, she and her children stood at his bedside weeping.

Baba comforted them. *"Why are you weeping? It's nothing. He'll be quite well. He'll be all right."*

Baba inclined his head toward the dying man and made a motion in his direction. Shortly afterward, the man regained consciousness. He opened his eyes and began to speak to his family. He lived. He was, in fact, saved.

Later, at Baba's death, the wife who had served Baba shed bitter tears for him. She had been so moved by him and the effect he had on her husband. She and three or four of her family members mourned his death greatly.

On Thursday, February 6th, Baba's final night on this earth plane, he gave Ravi instructions to purchase a cartload of wood. Ravi could not imagine why. He also requested him to give the traditional donation at the time at death and to

distribute *prasad*. Baba said that although Thursday was Guru day, Friday could also be Guru day and so *prasad* should be given.

It was on Thursday night that Baba's health turned bad. He experienced difficulty swallowing his tablets. He was to take six or seven medications with warm water but there was none available. He swallowed one tablet and spit it up. When Govind administered it in powdered form with some water, Baba could not swallow the mixture due to some constriction in his throat.

He had an urgent wish to return to Ram Bagh and warm himself at the *dhuni*. But according to Ravi, it being a police case with serious injury, Baba could not be moved. Baba told him, *"If I return to the dhuni, it's warmth would cure me."*

During all of Thursday night. Baba recited from the Gita, Ramayan and Vineputraka. Govind asked: *"Baba, is this what is done, that you are shot, being a mighty saint? A mahatma? How can it be?"*

And Baba told him, *"Krishna was shot by an arrow in the foot when a hunter mistook him for a deer and he died. Sita was left in the forest by Ram because she was accused of staying with devils, thus being impure. So the dhobi people said. Ram left her pregnant. She remained with Valmika and gave birth to two children, Lalu and Khush. The deities also were in trouble on earth".*

In the night, Baba called Govind to him. Govind said, "Yes, Baba."

Baba chanted and chanted to him, *"Govind, Govind, Hare Govind"*. 'Govind' is another name for Krishna. Baba kept chanting. *"No doctor can do anything for me", he said. "My doctor is God."*

He spoke of the time his teacher, the elder Kappali Baba brought his dearest devotee, Amarju back to life after he had died. This was witnessed by many.

At 6 a.m. the next morning, Baba awoke with apparent discomfort. While Govind performed *seva*, massaging Baba's head, Baba told him that it would be his last service. To Babu, he said, *"I will leave this body."*

Another devotee, Bapu responded, *"Yes, Baba, you must do as you see fit."* Govind implored him, *"Baba, don't say that."*

After a few minutes, Baba asked Govind to bring tea. When he returned, Baba asked him to get the Rani quickly. Obtain pure ghee and distribute it. Give to the Brahmans and do *Dharma*. Make a donation for some religious work. This is a must at the last hour of life. Baba was sweating.

His mouth tightened and his teeth became clenched. He was having difficulty coughing up some spittle. Baba loved some of the doctors who had been treating him and at the last, he sat up and shook hands with those five doctors who had now gathered around his bedside, for they had, in turn, developed a deep affection for him.

Then Jutindra placed his finger inside Baba's mouth only to find that the tongue was gone. Baba had already assumed the *khechari mudra*, recoiling his tongue to block the epiglottis. This would cause suffocation. So he was to leave his body.

His eyes were wide open and he breathed heavily, the jaw locked. It was not tetanus apparently because that was the only movement impeded. Raja Baba was standing at the foot of the bed. Baba sat up and gave him a last “*Sita Ram*” with folded palms. Then with the other devotees and doctors watching, Baba's eyes slowly closed as his breath rose up and his mouth relaxed open one last time, in a quiet smile.

At Baba's expiration, the physicians rolled in all their equipment and tried diverse ways to revive him, applying oxygen, pressing, hitting the chest cavity, and giving an injection to the heart, to no avail. It was 12:55 p.m. Whether or not Baba intentionally left his body or succumbed to some sudden unknown malfunction or had to expire in exchange for the life force given to the man in the bed next to him will always be a mystery.

It was Friday, the seventh day. Baba had told Govind that Thursday was Guru day. According to Hindus, Friday is not an auspicious day. But for Muslims, it is their holy day. Baba was shot by a Muslim. Was there a message for his assassin?

Baba also said that Guru Day could be a Friday. When on a Friday, it is called *Guru Sukracharya*, the devil's Guru day. Raman was the devil, very powerful as was the *Guru Sukracharya*.

Thursday is *Braspattiwar*, the *Brahman* Guru, a *devata*. Friday is called *Sudbudh*. ‘Sud’ means ‘pure’ ‘budh’ is the same root as Buddha, meaning ‘awake’, or

'awakened wisdom'. Then is Friday a connection to my Buddhist path of practice? Everything Baba did was a teaching to be contemplated.

That morning, a beggar woman had appeared suddenly at the clinic. When Baba saw her standing in the doorway, he said to give her a rupee. After Baba's last breath, Govind, Jutindra and Babu each gave money to a beggar woman outside the clinic - perhaps the very same one.

Raja Baba describes this time as a very strange one. He too felt that he had died. There was much weeping. Dr Mahor, one of the five physicians attending after Baba and a final year student in the MBBS program, remained staring at Baba for at least twenty minutes. He later arranged all details involving removal



of Baba's body for the post mortem and assisted with all the preparations to transport the body back to Ram Bagh.

For the post mortem, Baba's body was at first kept in the morgue on a blanket on the floor. Since it was already off hours by the time his body was brought

there, the post mortem could not be done on the same day. It was only done the following day, Saturday afternoon.

On Saturday morning, Shyam Sunder accompanied Amar to the morgue to see Baba's body. It was already about twenty-two hours after he had died but they

thought he was just sleeping peacefully. There was no sign of death, no rigor mortis which usually begins after twenty-four hours.

With three other bodies to work on, the doctors were kept busy. They all felt that Baba would get up at any moment. After the post mortem, blood flowed freely from his body. It was kept a total of 28 hours before the devotees could retrieve it and return with the body to Rath. There were nine of them: Raja Baba, Mukian, Shyam Sunder, Govind Soni, Amar Narayan Khare, Jutindra, Bapu, Ravi Kaushik, Krishnaswaroop and Prehlad Singh.

They had searched for flowers to garland Baba's body but to no avail. So they set off on the long trek back to Ram Bagh without flowers, in a 25-seater bus, rented for 1100 rupees, and travelled through the night. The mood was understandably somber.

That evening, the bus 'lost' the way. A local directed them down a rural track off the Hamirpur road. In the dark night, a flower shop mysteriously appeared. There was single garland – of roses, no less, Baba's favourite flower – waiting to place on Baba's body. Typically, garlands for sale were of single digit length and roses were an anomaly in these poorer outlying areas – not to mention the night 'shop'. Even more mysterious were its dimensions. The garland of roses was fifteen metres long. They chanted their hearts out the rest of the way.

On Sunday morning, February 9th, at 1:05 a.m. after a ten hour journey, they reached Ram Bagh. Baba's body was placed on the platform in the centre of the courtyard under the neem tree. Later it began to rain so they moved the body into the ashram side of Baba's *samādhi* at the *dhuni*. From there they could manage the crowds that were to come later.

From the moment Baba died until the time that his body was placed in the *samādhi* tomb, fifty-six hours had elapsed and, still, Baba's body showed no sign of death.

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7. BORN IN THE DUST

February 15th, 1986

One week after Baba's death, I rode in a bullock cart with Jialal, Baba's long-time beloved devotee, and Ramkalee, Baba's daughter, to Dhamana, his birthplace. It is only three kilometres from Ram Bagh, a one hour ride through wheat, lentil, gram and mustard fields – a traverse through time.

Walking, sometimes prancing, the huge-boned white bullocks, horns majestically upturned to the sky, pulled us easily across the rutted earth. We clung loosely to the bamboo sidings as the cart tossed us together like fruit in a basket, like bodies in a boat on a sea of wheat.

One of Ramkalee's six grandchildren, a young girl of about eight, sat up front with Jialal who was handling the reins. She periodically caught my eye, and giggled from time to time when a portion of dung spat from the creatures' anus and dropped unceremoniously down to the mud below.

Wherever trees clustered to shade a patch of green from the hot sun, we could see a village hidden in the ancient fields that had been ploughed and harvested for millennia. But one village alone awaited me. I eagerly scanned the horizon for Dhamana.

Finally, Jialal pointed to its green fronds. As we approached, I held that image of Dhamana's adobe houses huddled together for a long moment. Immediately, as we entered and stopped, a large crowd gathered to give welcome and to pour their love and affection on me.

At Jialal's house, I was served tea on the porch. The mother and children came to touch my feet though I covered the feet with my hands. A film of faces rolled past. Many of the adults stopped nearby and stood quietly, peacefully, reflecting the generations of their ancestors. I felt connected to them and very free in their presence. At the back of their eyes was a look of loss. Baba was in every face.

I followed Jialal and Ramkalee through the village to Baba's house. 'Babu' they used to call him. The village was neat, white-washed, with a small tank of water next to a temple - clay shingle-roofed houses, fields all around, and long seamless walls protecting the family enclosures that lined the narrow lanes. A lovely white temple spire rose just beside Baba's house. There was a large archway at the entrance to the compound and from there we could access the main building.

Ramkelee lives here with all her family members. I noticed the rooms were refreshingly clean and tidy. All the water pots were neatly lined up in a corner, shawls hung in the morning sunlight and new dung had been rubbed on the floors. I was



surprised at how tall Baba's 3 storied house was – built with traditional clay architecture on the first level, and brick upstairs.

A crowd climbed excitedly behind us as we ascended the wooden stairway to an upper porch. They waited on the landing as we proceeded up a ladder onto the roof. Ramkalee meanwhile hurried about with her purple dhoti slung over her head. She was like a candle, flickering here and there, making sure of all the preparations for the day were proceeding well.

As I focused my camera on the crowd of women and children gathered below, she came up to the roof carrying a brass tray. She had brought a bowl of *sabudana kheer*, a sweet milk mixed with millet, milk and milk sweets. Her mouth was serious and her eyes, like Baba's, large, globe-like, dark and tender. Her smile was rich with love, dignity and the tribal-like lineage of this millennial rural culture.

We were squatting when she lifted my foot, placed it on the tray and began to wash it with milk, then the other foot. She then drank the milk that had washed my feet. Watching her, tears stung my eyes. I was deeply overcome. Baba was strongly in my heart and I understood the milk to represent God's nectar, the milk of human loving kindness.

I tried to take a photograph of Ramkalee and as many of the people standing with her on the veranda that circled the inner courtyard. More and more rushed up the stairs to join in. There was just a low wall of bricks around the edge of the balcony on which they were squeezed together. Everyone wanted to be in the photo.

I waited to focus my camera on Ramkalee's face and as I did so a strange thing happened. The focus did not come but a streak of energy seemed to rush to the opening at the centre of the upper floor.

As soon as it passed, the crowd turned to look down through to the ground floor below. There had been a sound, not a familiar sound. Someone had fallen. Who? A child. I was shocked. I felt utterly responsible. A tragedy for the sake of a photo!

I could only think that the child must have fallen head first, and from that height, would have been badly injured or worse. Here we were in a village isolated from every kind of medical service. I raced down the stairs.

It was a young girl. She was laid out on a cot in the foyer. Blood seemed to be streaming from her head. I was truly horrified. She did not move, but lay wide-eyed looking at the ceiling. I could scarcely face her, so foolish did I feel, so guilty for her needless pain.

She could see me and stared at me with black lucid eyes. I stifled a cry within and stroked her forehead. Confusion arose amongst the relatives and friends who were hovering around her bed.

I asked her where she was hurt and she motioned to her puckered mouth. It was quite swollen on the lips and bloody inside. Apparently, she had fallen head first but landed on her mouth on a brick surface. It was as though she had kissed the ground. She had no other visible injury.

Her father came in a hysterical state. "*What happened, my child? Ram, Ram, Ram, Ram.*" He pleaded and moaned repeatedly, invoking God's name. She used her simple adult-like motion again, touching her lips with the palm of her hand and waving it in the air dismissively to say, "*My lips (mouth) only, nothing else wrong*". The child's name was Maya. She was a jewel.

After a few moments, she sat up and even stood on the bed quite normally. Jialal began to cry. We were all amazed, stunned both with the way Maya had fallen and how she was saved. It was as if Baba had reached a divine palm down to catch her, and as she fell, she had kissed his hand.

We continued to hover over her protectively and anxiously. I offered her milk but she said she was fasting and refused even water. She was very brave.

We continued to ask her if she was in any pain. She would just look up at us, her lips puckered together, touch her fingers to her mouth, and wave her palm sideways in that same gesture that said the wound was only in her mouth. Soon, a fine young doctor appeared and administered a tetanus shot, some antibiotic tablets, and cleaned her mouth.

Seeing that she was quite well, what had been a panic a few minutes earlier dissolved into an air of bliss. I myself was deeply relieved for if Maya had been seriously injured, getting her proper medical attention would have been traumatic, more than one hour in a bullock cart just to reach the crude hospital facilities in Rath.

I wandered out into the courtyard to the place where Maya had fallen. Kneeling down, I rubbed the brick surface of the ground with the palm of my hand and peered up into the opening through the centre of the house. There, high above my head was the balustrade where she had been standing. It seemed really quite unbelievable.

It was then that I saw it. As I stood up, I found myself facing a support beam that rose from the ground.

At eye level, tacked onto that pillar was a framed photo of Baba meditating.

I was staggered. It was as if Baba himself were present and had seen it all.

The beauty of that moment washed through me in a wave of faith, gratitude and joyous wonder at the power of Baba's love, beyond death, beyond our meager human understanding.

A rapturous aura now pervaded the household. Once Maya was sent home, we returned upstairs and ate sweets and *sabudana kheer* with raisins and nuts. But we were all in a distracted mood. Jialal kept coming back to the incident, remarking how miraculous and excellent was Baba's intervention.

Again and again, I remembered that photo of Baba in a small wooden frame hanging on the pillar right above the place where Maya's face hit the ground, as if indeed her fall had been an act of homage to him!

In the afternoon I visited Maya's house and found her sitting in the courtyard while an older sister braided her hair. She was radiant. She looked completely changed, neatly dressed, her demeanor shy, eyes shining with joy and beauty. At Jialal's house, his wife washed my feet and before I could stop either of them, they drank the water. On the rooftop, we ate dhal and *kichauri*, an easily



digestible rice and lentil porridge, and soon were off again, rocking to and fro in the bullock cart on the return road to Ram Bagh.

We passed a row of electric poles plunged into the earth like so many *tirsuls*, the three-pronged *trilojan*, the spear of Lord Shankar. Curiously, they were strung in the direction of Dhamana, though the village is not yet electrified. Parrots, crows and blue throats played above our heads and took turns sitting on the wire. But for most of the journey, I was absorbed in the memory of all that had just transpired.

Ram Bagh, February 18th, 1986

When I recounted this story to Raja Baba, other tales of Baba's miraculous doings came to mind. One night, in the year of the Allahabad Kumbh Mela, Baba was walking on the roof of his temple. There was no guardrail. He walked straight off the edge in the darkness and plunged some twenty-five feet below, incurring only a small injury to one shoulder and one leg. With massage therapy applied daily by his devotees, within three months he was completely fit and travelled a long way to attend the Kumbh Mela festival.

One year, during a *bhandara* festival at the temple, a small child fell from the same roof. After the fall, he got up and ran to Baba. He was not injured in any way.

Some of the devotees had other stories and memories of Baba that they happily shared. On the Betua river, there is a famous pilgrimage place of Parasar Rishi. It is high above the river. There the waters are very deep and full of fish. Baba used to come here. The bus goes from Rath to Chandot after crossing the Betua. It was when Baba visited Parasar that his mind changed and he became a saint.

This is how it was told to me by Govind, who attended a village *bhandara* at Bharua Sumerpur with Baba. Baba asked him to look at a particular tree. Govind saw in the tree a saint-like image. It was Gautama Buddha surrounded by light. After some time, it disappeared. He was very affected by that sight.

*"To whom you are kind, you'll get some darshan.
Who will know you, he will become God."*

*Who knows the mystery of love, the love inside is eternal
Even when strictness is shown, as father with child."*

Shyam Sunder first met Baba during the first anniversary celebration of Tutti Baba's *samādhī*. His own Guru was Sarir Baba. So he hesitated to accept Kappali Baba as a Guru. A saint sitting beside Baba said to him one day, unsolicited, "You have a number of Gurus. Your first grade teacher is also your guru."

Baba also spoke to him as I told earlier, and he realized Baba's power.

That night, as he slept on Raja Baba's veranda, a dog bit him in the hip. In the morning he was in extreme pain. Wherever he looked, at the same time feeling this pain, he saw Lord Krishna. He came to the *dhuni*, and in his heart asked that Baba help him to return to his original position, so that he would not see Lord Krishna everywhere, for he could bear it no longer.

Baba called him by name and said, "*Shyam Sunder, for you, I am Sarir Baba. I'm with you twenty-four hours a day. Don't worry.*"

Once when Shyam Sunder went to see his father-in-law in Rath, he visited Ram Bagh. While leaving, he slipped in the courtyard and fell down. He believed that Baba had punished him and was not giving him the affection he used to receive from Sarir Baba. He thought to himself, "*If Baba is Sarir Baba, then he should repeat all the actions of Sarir Baba with me.*"

Then he sat on the porch outside the *dhuni* and wept until there was not a tear left in his eyes, wishing that Baba would treat him as Sarir Baba had. Baba immediately called him inside, took Shyam Sunder in his lap like a baby and blessed him and showered him with affection – this was just as Sarir Baba used to do. Shyam Sunder's faith was completely restored.

One day, Shyam Sunder uttered unkind words in Baba presence. When he was bitten by a scorpion that day, he took it as his punishment to rectify this mistake. He refused to go to the hospital. Baba encouraged him, but finally, when he was sure that he would not take any treatment, When Baba put held his finger above the bite, the pain vanished. Then Baba instructed him, "*You'll have to remember Sarir Baba all night.*"

Shyam Sunder did so. In the morning, there was no trace of the bite and no pain whatsoever. Shyam Sunder noticed that a snake had been sleeping with him. Baba suggested that it may have been Sarir Baba. *"He might have come to meet you,"*

Baba planted seeds in us. Shyam Sunder says, "I wanted nothing from Baba, not *moksha*, liberation, or anything, just his love. And I was getting it."

When Baba was a young farmer, he took his animals to the field and fed them his own crop which was meant to be stored for lean times. With his *chung*, a tamboura-like instrument, he would sit in a lonely place, singing and dancing for the divine in a state of *magan*, elation or bliss. He forgot everything – until the animals wandered away and his other farm work was neglected. Even so, he would often help plough his neighbours' fields.

Once, Baba went to Beri, to visit his guru, the elder Kappali Baba, to have *darshan*. On the way, he reached the Betua River. It was overflowing from the rains but for his love of elder Sri Kappali Baba, Babaji jumped into the river. It was raining hard and he did not know how to swim. Midway, he found himself unable to continue.



Suddenly, Baba realized that he was standing on an island. It felt solid but it was, in fact, an 'island of water'. This mysterious life-saving incident strengthened his faith and he overcame his fear of death. Again he jumped into the river and this time he was able to reach the village of Beri on the other side.

Finally, he reached the temple where the elder, Sri Kappali Baba, was staying. Kappali Baba told him to leave immediately. He obeyed the word of the guru and departed that very day. In the same way Babaji used to chase me out,

sending me on pilgrimage here and there in remote places – to test my faith. I always came back to him, knowing where Truth resided.

Baba taught, "We are nothing. The path of love requires no meditation or kriya. Just remain a lover of Truth, God. Every method is useless without love for God.

"Purity of love is the only way. There is nothing to learn. We have everything. We must practise it."

February 20th, 1986

At Ram Bagh, Babji's devotees continue to gather, ruminating and sharing



stories about the role he played in their lives. They are very stricken by the loss of their teacher and dear friend.

Although Baba is not physically present, I think of him all the time, and feel his presence especially when I am near Raja Baba. Who will know my heart now, I

thought? And who will protect me?

Yesterday morning while sitting at the *dhuni* with my eyes closed, I simulated being at this very spot in December when Baba was still alive, sensing somehow that he was not there in body but was, in fact, with me. With these thoughts, I felt Baba's actual palm land on my head and rest there for what seemed like a very long moment. I did not move. I was so thrilled with this experience.

Later, I kneeled for the first time to Raja Baba, who had assumed Babaji's empty seat at the *dhuni*. Babaji had once told Ravi that he himself and Raja were the same. I realised it then, truly. Raja Baba placed his hand on my head as Babaji always used to do to bless me. It was the same hand!

When I sit next to Raja Baba at the *dhuni*, we never speak except when I first enter and he checks to see if I have a grain sack to sit on or when the tea is served and I offer him my cup, which he takes, sips from lightly and returns to me. This in itself is a blessing.

This morning we were seated a long time. It was crowded. My legs ached and the marble floor of the *dhuni* area began to feel very cold. I was about to stand up when Raja Baba rose, reached for a small carpet from Babaji's *asan* (sitting place) and tried to push it under my feet. Such is his care for my well-being

During the early afternoon, still before lunch, I was hungering for a sweet. I received *prasad* to distribute, leaving for myself half a *pera*, a favourite milksweet. I really looked forward to it. After I swallowed it down hastily, Mukian came along and handed me another half. Baba was in my mind again and was taking care of my silly greed. Soon, an abundance of sweets arrived from Girija, including a peanut type and a sesame *ladoo* called *tilia*.

Why need I worry for anything? Babaji was indulging me like a child. The *prasad* flowed from all directions.

And so I learned how Babaji pays visits through his disciples: in Raja Baba when he blesses me; in Halke Baba, when he sounds Baba's *damru*; in Mukian's *arti* flame; in Haridas blowing the *shank* horn or Laxmi at the gongs. Someone exclaims at the kirtan, "Ahah!" and I hear Baba. Hands clap with a cave-like echo and it is Baba. The *dhuni* burns bright with splendour and it is Babaji. The dog Kalu lies dying with pain, crying for his master – it is Babaji.

Kalu cried for three days after Baba's death. And then he expired.

During my stay in Ram Bagh, I visited some of the homes of Baba's most ardent devotees. Some afternoons, I would visit Mito's harmonium workshop inside his house and watch him construct my portable harmonium-to-be.

Each and every piece was hand-made, molded and assembled with far more patience than I had, not to mention Mito's ability to do such fine work with three missing fingers - cutting, measuring, filing, assembling and masterfully playing his instruments. While working, he entertained a constant flow of visitors who would come to chat, smoke *bidis*, have a cup of tea or discuss some business.

I also visited the home of Girija, daughter of Sethji, a cloth merchant and old devotee of Baba. They both come regularly to the temple and will help prepare for the annual *Katha*, a two week festival of reading the Bhagvad Gita. On the feast day when it culminates, villagers from the whole region travel here, many by bullock carts laden with gifts of pulses and grains for the Temple and they camp in makeshift tents or under large tree in the adjoining fields.



I have known Girija for years. She is younger than me but looks worn, having endured much illness.

Though lean and graying, she is still buoyant and joyful. After offering me traditional curries and

chapattis for my meal, we climb up to the roof of her house to wash my bowl.

Girija's guru lives in another town. She went to him after the elder Kappali Baba took final *samādhī*, thinking that no other saint lived in Ram Bagh. Then she fell ill for a very long time and could not recover. One day, she felt drawn to Ram Bagh. It was as if Babaji had called her. After that, her health rapidly improved. Girija attributed this to Baba's divine healing powers.

February 21, 1986

Babaji worked on our hearts the way Mito works on his wood, carving and sculpting it meticulously. Now some wicked types visit Raja Baba. He is very tolerant even in the face of their threats to take over Ram Bagh. No one ever dared challenge our Kappali Baba in this way.

इंगे लवता

8. LEGACY OF LOVE

Kathmandu March 3, 1986

I have returned from India but in form only, thin, depleted and sad, like a lost child. I think of Baba all the time. I look for him everywhere, hoping against hope that he will reappear in some earthly way. His photographs hang on every wall of the house, even over the windows. I don't want to see anything except his face.

I offer flowers, incense and candles to Babaji and perform *arti* every day along with my meditations. Early this morning, about 4 a.m. Didi was usually up cleaning when I rose to do my meditation but I continued to sleep awhile and had a very vivid dream of Babaji.

I was with him at the *dhuni* in Ram Bagh. A few others were present and we were all busy with tasks of *seva* in and around the *dhuni* area. Baba sat on his *gudi*. As I was wiping the marble floor around the *dhuni* perimeter, I discovered two mysterious bundles, two tiny babies sweetly wrapped in coloured blankets. I did not know how they had come there, or if they were even alive.

Babaji had been observing me silently. But when I gathered the babies up in my arms and sat both of them in the hot wood and ash of the *dhuni* itself, Baba quickly motioned to me to remove them at once, with not a shred of anger or disapproval. "*It's too hot for them in there,*" he warned.

I knew he was right, but in the dream I had become stupid. I did not know where else to put the bundles and treated them as if they were an offering!

Obedient to Babaji, I removed them from the fire and placed them outside the



black wooden doors to the garden.

At that moment, I woke up. These actions in the dream disturbed my happiness that I had seen Babaji. But I felt that what I had done with

the babies was a sign, a message to me. It was not meant to portray me as a cold-hearted, unaware, ignorant person who could sacrifice babies alive.

Rather, it symbolized the self-sacrifice I am being asked to make, to burn myself in the fire of Baba's love, to be purified through *darshan* and spiritual practice. This must be done twice, through body and mind,

Those babies also represent the two worlds of my life, professional work and personal religious aspiration, and I must give them up – both – in the holocaust of pure love. Baba's intervention could mean one of two things, or possibly both; that I was not ready for such painful and extreme sacrifice and purification, and so would have to wait. And, or, that my path would take me another way, through a different gate that saved me from the intense trial of fire.

As it turned out, I was not to be spared the fire. But I would go through a different gate of purification. And though I was perhaps not ready for a painful and extreme sacrifice, it would come nevertheless.

At work, it already was like that fire itself. I feel estranged. The project manager, who I discovered is a serious alcoholic, is furious with me for my long absence. He claims that he was never informed, but Limbuji assures me he passed on both

my telegrams asking for extended leave. I will not be treated justly by these characters regardless of how I behave.

With Baba gone, I am orphaned, a *tuhara*. I have no interest in joining this career life. I think of remaining in India somewhere, somehow, to serve in such a way that my religious commitments will not be considered freakish by my colleagues. Their attitude so enervates me, I often feel that working with them disconnects me from what I value most.

But even so, I must cultivate loving-kindness towards them, to everyone in fact. If they try to make me unhappy I should try to be compassionate because they are unhappy themselves. How can I be so certain? Because truly happy humans only spread their joy to everyone. If I maintain and sustain that kind of inner happiness, then only can it reach them. Otherwise the opposite will happen and the unhappiness around me will percolate destructively through my own mind.

April 18, 1986

In the early hours of Saturday morning I was deeply concentrated, writing a proposal – a new strategy for our faltering program. By 3 a.m., I fell asleep when Baba returned to me in a dream.

I saw our family of devotees gathered around Baba. He was lying dead on his cot. Everyone was busy in the many tasks that needed doing. They seemed to work with extra vigour but I just loitered around his body, feeling immensely sad and not knowing what to do with myself. Baba had died and would not get up.

By nightfall, they all went out into the garden and I was left alone with Baba's body and Raja Baba. We crouched at Baba's bedside. Then Baba sat up and smiled joyfully, giggling like a small child. "Why do you weep?" he scolded me. "Am I not here with you?"

Raja and I attended to him. He was in a very playful mood and remonstrated, "Look, Meera, I am not dead."

We listened to his wisdom in a state of bliss and revelled for what seemed like long hours in his company. I did not want to wake up from that dream.

Not long afterwards, I fell desperately ill and fought a fever for a week. Work seemed like a horror. I often fell into gloomy, even despairing thoughts.

Fortunately, my meditations and practice at Maha Vihara with Bhante U Nyanapurnika were a mainstay. Still, It was a strain to repel the heaviness of heart and feelings of unworthiness under the canopy of negativity and criticism coming from the UN project manager and those under his influence.

Then Raja Baba and Amar arrived from India. My house became filled with the spirit of our Kappali Baba. Raja advised me to return to my office next day and observe any changes that our Babaji had wrought there.

For a few days the atmosphere did seem more benevolent and I was able to work alongside my colleagues with kind feelings in my heart. I welcomed Baba's intervention. It gave me respite and encouragement; but clearly I would have to face these politics fearlessly on my own. I would have to grow faith and spiritual stamina enough to be like a lioness.

May 9th, 1986

Raja Baba and I were driving back from Kathmandu on the Ring Road. We had gone to the optometrist to fit glasses for him. At the Swayambu Temple intersection, a little girl ran out from a crowd in front of my vehicle with no warning. Though I braked and the car came to a stop, I hit her head on.

She was thrown up and away some fifteen feet. Both Baba and I thought she was dead. The girl stood up after a few minutes but I had heard of a case where a fatally injured person stood up after being hit and then collapsed again.

We immediately rushed with her in the car to Tribhuvan Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu. It is run by the Japanese. Two men from her village accompanied us and members of her family followed in another vehicle. One of the men was shouting and accusing me in the car and I was very distressed. I just wanted to die then and there. All my mantras and meditations went out the window. I felt Baba's presence together with a sickly, guilty and miserable state of mind. What had I done to this poor child?

While she was being examined, I wept. As I waited, I thought back on my time in this valley, and chatted with Mala, the other man who had accompanied us in the car. He runs a tea-stall at the site of the accident and came along just to do *seva*, to be of help. We spoke of *Dharma* and he was extremely kind to me,

comforting me with words about how life unfolds and our being helpless in it. He was also exceedingly kind to Raja Baba, updating him about the child's condition as news was received.

Finally the doctors came out with a report. There were no head injuries, no fractures and no abnormalities in any of the X-rays, just bruises and a small cut on the head. She was saved! I could not believe it. I bowed obeisance and gratitude to Baba in my heart.

Then the mother came with other villagers and there was talk of a police case. The doctors forewarned me that this could incur trouble and great expense. They managed to convince the mother that it was not necessary. She put her thumb-prints on a statement to that effect.

I reflected often on this incident. Having Baba with me in the car was protection. I spoke impatiently with him when he asked to return the glasses because he didn't see so clearly with them and this fault had ripened into such bad karma. Who can know?

I resolved to be more pure, humble and loving to Raja Baba as he is very saintly. I must develop more respectfulness and loving-kindness to him and all my elders, and then to others – even those who are against me – as to myself. Otherwise, how can I dare to assume that I am a serious practitioner on the path?

May 10th, 1986

Raja Baba has sores on his face that suppurate. I clean them daily with painstaking care and devotion. On our visit to the local hospital for tests, I learn that these lesions are leprosy. I fear I'll catch it too from nursing him. I begin to accept and surrender to this. If I must have leprosy, I will have it and be cured, I hope. I will receive it as Baba's gift and not feel remorse. I will not stop taking care of Babaji to ameliorate his suffering. But I am scared.

December 1986

A year ending. A year in perspective in which I have faced the loss of Baba just when I had found him again, at least physically accessible to me.

At work, a few unsavoury adversaries are violating my trust. I feel my attachment to justice and the absence of it in this scenario sting sharply. I need to see it in

the light of my own life's karma in this vortex of conflict and disturbance. So I cultivate my meditation and study the teachings of the Buddha to regain my composure.

Within me I nourish the faith that I am capable of discovering the correct posture for self-purification, devoid of expectations, renounce the fruit of my actions, recognize my thoughts as passing clouds in the sky of my mind and observe them in repose and tranquility. But only if I put forth supreme effort.

Sometimes, it does not seem possible. The mind is weakened and unbalanced by marauding forces. I strive and practise to slowly, relentlessly achieve greater compassion, tolerance and control, to still the mind. And to feel genuine loving-kindness for these persons that are trying to harm me. I am not on that level yet.



I keep on reliving the events prior to and directly after Baba's death. In my heart, he visits me and sends emissaries of love to support me, to bring peace into my home. Papa calls me regularly, Bhante, Chini Guruma, Jane, Carla, Eva and my little Kailash are nearby. At the project, there are good people who know the quality of my work even amidst those who scheme to undermine me.

Right now, the unfriendly ones seem to have the upper hand. But I will persevere.

January 1, 1987

Will this be a year of spiritual advancement? Step slowly. Do not forget to renounce the fruit of action and do not build expectations. Hope not and be happy. Study. Recall Baba's words of instruction to me. He says,

"Life, our meeting, the whole exercise is only 'chin suk', an instant, a glimpse." - quoted from Prem Yog scripture on the Yoga of Love, one of Baba's favourites.

I reflect on my deep aspiration to be a lady of the highest quality, to be true in my religious practice. Such merit is not easily achieved. I need inner strength, purity of heart and great care.

With some, this comes naturally; with me, only by supreme effort can I change all these weak habits of mind and action that I have developed and allowed to distract from the path of purity. But in spite of these failings, coming back to Baba, he was always ready to forgive me. He knew my heart completely and the forgiveness was his to give. This made him so great in my eyes.

When my situation feels completely abject and hopeless, I remind myself how Baba suffered, saint that he was. Then, by comparison, why should I, carrying the stains of all my wrong actions, be afraid to suffer or mind all the trials I must endure?

Thus far, no one has tortured or physically injured or tried to murder me. These insults and assaults, then, are but air, words disturbing the mind. Let Baba be my example. Truly, Baba always exhorted me to be brave and not to weep.

"A lion never weeps," Baba told me. And I remind myself, I should not weep at all. I should not weep at all.

January 2, 1987

Since Baba's death, I have worn white for the whole year on every Friday, the day of the week that he died. It is my way of honouring him. Sadly, it fuels hostility and judgments from the unfriendly contingency at work. No doubt, I am too conspicuous, a Westerner in a white sari – not standard Nepali UN office dress code for Westerners! But I do it with joy because it is my *bhakti*, my devotional practice to my Guru. And Baba's gives me strength.

This is the first Friday in 1987, with six more Fridays remaining until the one year anniversary of his death. Six more days in white, the mourning colour worn in Asia. People are frightened of death and they also don't understand what I am doing or why. I have to remember this and be compassionate to them.

From the Ramayana, Baba taught nine forms of *bhakti*. Savri described these to Ram. Raja Baba translated for me:

1. Do devotional practice, *bhakti*, in the company of saints.
2. Listen to scriptural discourses. Always live in purity and be uplifted, happy.
3. Do Guru devotion, worship and service, *seva*.
4. Do not want respect!
5. In daily speech and relationships, always perform praises and holy chants.
6. Do mantras repeating divine phrases and holy names; call on your Guru with respect, belief and determination or faith. Control the senses.
One who does this is said to be honest.
7. Treat all men as equals. See the divine in everything, everyone. Guru is your superior guide.
8. Whatever His wish, it is His gift. Be satisfied, content. Do not see others' faults, see your own.
9. Live simply without deception, simple in idea, sweetly, and take only divine help, directly or through the Guru, no one else's.

For one who develops and practices these qualities and ways of devotion all is forgiven. It depends on one's intention.

During my last meetings with Kappali Baba, I was blessed to receive guidance from one so highly realized. Had he remained longer on this earth, how much more I could have learned. Such a gain, and such a loss – leaving me in this imperfect state. I have to take this abandonment as a teaching – maybe the hardest one of all – so it may bear a greater fruit?

इंगे लता

9. THE BLESSING BEAD

February 6th, 1987

I have the good fortune to be in India today, in Ram Bagh itself in time for the start of a holy festival or *Yug* commemorating the one year anniversary of Baba's death. It is neither a celebration nor a time of sorrow for all who loved him come near and are together again as we were in his lifetime, like beads on a *mala*.

My trip from Kathmandu was the familiar route through Varanasi and Khadjuraho airports. Sethji, as shrivelled and ancient as he is, came all the way to Khadjuraho airport on a bicycle, having arrived in town from Mahoba on a rented motorcycle. He came early and my flight was delayed one hour, so the timing was perfect. I was very comforted to receive his welcome.

We could not make it on the same day to Rath due to bus misconnections. Nevertheless, I felt very light. Almost as I did fourteen months ago passing this same route on my way to see Baba himself.

How much magic he wove into my heart. I cannot describe it to anyone. Through the window of the bus, the sunlight reflected from the fields, the leaf shapes glistening in sunset hues, dry mountain rock erupting from the outstretched fields – in all of it I could see only Baba's face.

I reflect on Baba's teaching: *"All is suffering. The road is so dangerous and*

painful, it is very hard. Be brave. Put all far from you. Practise non-attachment. From attachment springs attachment. Free yourself from attachment."

February 7th, 1987

It is the one year anniversary of Baba's death. Last year it fell on a Friday. Today is Saturday. Aquarius. Yesterday I wore white as I have every Friday for the last fifty-two weeks that I have mourned Baba's death. It was my last Friday in white.

Ram Bagh is once again a tranquil refuge from the world in spite of the frenzied preparations for the crowds that would soon arrive. Baba's devotees gather daily. On Thursday night his statue arrived from Jaipur, just in time for the memorial. News has reached the town and some disciples come especially to view the statue but are disappointed. They feel that it is not a good likeness of Baba. They want him, in fact. How can a marble image satisfy their hearts?

But Raja Baba would not consider having another one made, whether it is like him or not. I promise them that it will change over time and it will look like Baba one day. That will be his surprise to us!

On one of my last nights with Baba, the *dhuni* was quite full with beautiful sounds of a kirtan. Raja Baba and I sat opposite Baba, absorbed in the harmonium and tabla chants. My eyes were closed but I could clearly see Baba. And when I looked, he was there, seated in front of me, resplendent, meditating, emitting joy and wisdom by his very presence.

I closed my eyes again and I could still see his image, clear and bright as if my eyes were open. I meditated on that brightness. Suddenly, he disappeared. I



wondered if he was still in the room and saw that he had just stepped out. But even in his absence, I felt that fullness and light.

I knew these were the last days, last *darshans*. I did not know that I knew, but I sensed it and then put it aside, hoping these were just usual fears. But they were more than that...

Now, sitting here at the *dhuni*, Baba has truly gone. Yet, he is with me. I can reach him. Since Baba's death, this internal way of *darshan* has recurred a few times, when I could better transcend my grief. What compassion he showed to prepare me for that moment of separation.

From the songs of the great poet, Kabir:

"Always be happy.
No question of giving
or taking for God.
We drown in deep
rivers;
and the body is like a
boat.

Be attached to the
sailor, God.
Tolerate good and
evil from all.
Don't be fired by
harsh words.

Kabir says, listen
brother sadhus,
be attached to the
feet of the Master.
All that is perceptible
by the senses and
the heart is really only
Maya, illusion."



*"We have to go on a long journey,
Why are you sleeping?
Be conscious, awake, you sleeper,
why be engaged in this sleep of attachment?"*

*In the time of worship you turn your face away,
so be careful,
don't waste your time.
Your destination is far off,
the journey is difficult
and you must travel alone.*

*No one will accompany you
so why waste time,
the burden is increasing every day.
The Lord of death awaits you,
laughing to steal your breath from inside you.
The sleep is deep, your sailboat vehicle is old,
you won't cross to the other shore.*

*Kabir says: why do you eat the principle
instead of the interest?"*

February 8th, 1987

Raja Baba recalls that when Baba was in the isolation ward of the hospital, the smell of human defecation permeated the air and many could not bear it. They would wait outdoors on the grounds of the hospital. But Raja Baba and Mukian would not leave Baba's side. Baba told them: *"This is what hell is like."*

They were unable to cook there, so food was a problem. Moreover, they had nothing to sleep on and had to squat on the floor all night. But in fasting, Raja Baba described how the body became zero and *dhyān* would increase.

Raja Baba told the story of three fish in a tank. The fisherman's plan was to empty the tank and catch all three. One fish was always alert and mindful. As he saw the water beginning to drain out of the tank, he realised the danger he was in and that he would die once all the water had left the tank. So he followed the current out and escaped to a lake.

The second fish only realised when there was very little water left what was going to happen to him so he swam out of the tank on the little current that was still flowing. But he could not get past the small flowers growing on the bank. Soon he turned on his back and began to flap his tail. When the fisherman saw this, he took this fish to be diseased. He picked it up and threw it into the lake where it quickly recovered and swam away to its freedom.

The third fish was not so lucky. It lay in the shallow bottom of the tank having been unaware of the diminishing water in the tank until it was too late. And when it began to flap around, the fisherman caught it in his hands and took it home to eat.

What a dear sweet memory, remembering a time with Raja Baba, Govind, Dhayi and some other devotees who were sitting near Mitolal at the well as he played the harmonium. Today is the first anniversary of Babaji's body being placed into the samādhi. Babu says it is the real scene now running through his mind. It is happening right now.

Raja Baba told another story about three students who were studying reincarnation. And here is what they had to learn in the course. The first one learned how to mend together the bones of a dead animal. The second one learned how to cover it with flesh. And the third student learned how to breathe life back into it.

On the path they found a pile of bones. So the first mended them as he had learnt and the second put flesh on them until they looked real. Then the third student brought the animal back to life just as he had been taught in the course. But it turned out to be a large ferocious animal and once alive, it saw all three students, and in its great hunger, devoured them.

So, before action, be discriminating and consider the result of our actions. I remember my lesson at the *dhuni*; offer first to Baba, whether it's a cup of tea, the meal, everything. There are also more subtle forms of offering such as helping out or listening.

We should be careful, clear and not leave things for others to do if we can take care of them. Even a small act of consideration is worth undertaking.

The traditional talks and preparations for the anniversary *Yug* continue in a very extraordinary fashion. An organised calm – if one can call it that – pervades the

ashram. A committee of the most well-to-do merchants from Rath and nearby villages including Dhammana has gathered to assist Raja Baba with all the last-minute details.

Now a large thatch shelter is constructed at the side of the great garden to house the pandits during their chanting. Five festive decorations hang in the air above the marquee with coloured rice designs adorning the vestibules for each of the five pandits including our own Swami Gopaldas. He is a real showman.

The microphones are in place, and for me, a private and spacious brick room has been especially built overlooking the *dhuni* and the *samādhī*, atop the roof of the cloister. It happens to be the very corner where the driver and his accomplice secretly broke in to Ram Bagh, plotting their assault of Kappali Baba that night.

This room affords me immeasurable comfort and privacy such as I had never known during my previous days in Ram Bagh. I can bath and meditate undisturbed. There is even electricity, some shelves below the ceiling for birds to nest in, and for me, a view of the activities in the cloister of the ashram.

I am invited to speak to the devotees, especially a group of village women, some with their children. They have travelled far to join the memorial and chant for Babaji



Seated on carpets amidst colourful flags and garlands of lush flowers, the bright-eyed ladies are dressed in their finest. I'm

the only Westerner. It's a joy to be able to speak to them in their own language.

They fall silent when I am handed the microphone. Sitting on a platform made for the pundits and using simple words in the local *Bundeilkhanda* dialect, I share my story about how I met Baba and how he changed my life.

This was a very moving experience for me. It brought me closer to all the community of devotees that I'd only seen as silhouettes on the horizons of my years at Ram Bagh. All of us have received so much from Babaji and now, at last, we have spoken to each other heart to heart.

February 9th, 1987

All day I was in a quandary. Return to work in time or stay for Baba's *Yug*. It's a question of sacrifice. To go is to lose presence here at a final day for Baba, a holy day in my life and I have been so often absent. To stay fuels the hostility of co-workers at the UN further. I am preoccupied with the consequences of my choice, how it will affect me and those who are my truest friends.

In the afternoon, after Baba's memorial statue had been properly installed, Raja Baba was so kind and understanding, saying that my work was complete here and now I could go if I needed to!

My heart felt a heaviness. How could I leave now when the sacred ceremonies are about to commence? Only once in my lifetime would such an event take place, a one-year anniversary memorial to Baba's beautiful life and death. And so much loving preparation had been undertaken. There was also the anticipation of seeing all the devotees together again.

I knew that staying would invite recrimination from hostile colleagues. But by evening it was clear – there was nowhere else for me to be but here. I am learning. My enemies may gather to block my way but as they appear before me, I know, I am not less than they!!

A very great saint had come to attend the *Yug*, Govind's first teacher, Malangdas Maharaj. He is said to be one hundred and fourteen years old – I have never met anyone of such an age until I had visited him once with Baba some years ago. What a joy to share in his ceaseless refrain of devotion to God, chanting divine praises, *Ram, Ram, Hare Ram*; and the ebullience of all his devotees as they join in his *sadhana*.

Though blind, he could see, though infirm and so old, he could move with agility and knew all that was taking place around him. He did not miss a beat. Maharaji was also very caring about well-being. One afternoon, I found him sitting in the inner corridor of the cloister enjoying the coolness of the shade. I came close and sat on the floor at his feet.

"Meera", he pronounced, wagging his puffy index finger at me with majestic authority, *"I've been a sadhu for more than 80 years. I've met thousands of these beggars. There has never been one like your Baba. He is unique. He is God-like. Worship him."*

I felt very clumsy and ignorant like a newborn next to one so ancient and wise. His words delighted me. I knew what he said was true, but I had not met all those seekers that he had. My sense of validation had always come purely from what I felt in my own heart.

Around midnight, I was unable to sleep. Suddenly a sound came from Maharaji's spot in the inner cloister. I tiptoed out in the coolness of the night to check on him and found his blankets on the floor. Stooping, I began to lift them so that I could cover him again.

Suddenly, Maharaji grunted. It gave me a fright. "Meera?" he called out. It was pitch dark and I could just make out his form. How did he know it was me? Silly question - what these beings can know one should not ask!

"Yes, Maharaji," I answered softly.

"Tumko neid kyon nay ayah? Why aren't you asleep?" he questioned me.

"Maharaji, I have come to put the blankets over you again. They've fallen on the floor. You'll catch cold."

He sat up and beckoned me to sit next to him. *"Auw, beeta, auw. Baito. Tumhare liye kuchu hain hamari pas. Come my little daughter, come and sit down. I have something for you."*

Maharaji reached into his sackcloth garment and fumbled around for a few minutes. His robe bulged out far more than the mass of his body. I thought there must be many things tucked away in a myriad of secret pockets inside that great old coat.

But what could he possibly have for me? And why does he want to give it to me in the middle of the night? Maybe some old *prasad*, probably dried puffed sweetened balls of rice wrapped in a bit of old newspaper that he'd been carrying around for a while. I did not much savour such an offering but, since it was from him, it would be special and I wanted to receive it with gratitude.



Finally, I watched as his ancient hand emerged from the coat. He opened it and in his palm I saw a small soiled plastic bag knotted at the top. Maharaji handed it to me and I took it with the happiness of a child. Sitting next to him with his more than a century of years. I could not fathom anyone being so old.

Then he laid himself down. I covered him as best as I could with the heavy blanket and crept away silently in the night. When I reached the *dhuni*, I eagerly opened my little parcel of *prasad* to inspect it. What could it be?

Untying the knot, I found a crumpled piece of newspaper just as I had imagined. There was enough light from the cloister to make out the

contents of the package Maharaji had bequeathed me.

Inside it was not puffed rice at all but a thing of great beauty and significance for me. It was a large *rudraksh* bead and a one rupee coin from the year 1985. In November, 1985, Babaji had given me a one rupee coin, but I did not know what it meant until Raja Baba explained how a father gives his daughter a coin wrapped in her sari when she leaves for her father-in-law's house.

Now I receive this uncanny affirmation of my connection to Babaji from this gentle and magnanimous being. Perhaps Malangdas Maharaj had kept these treasures for me for some time.

I marveled, holding these gifts, especially the long-sought after *mala* bead, mahogany brown, well-polished with age. To someone else, perhaps this would have meant nothing, or very little. To me it was truly special because it was exactly the bead I had been searching for.

I always carried with me a *mala* of smaller *rudraksh* beads given to me by Babaji when I first came to Ram Bagh 14 years ago. But it was missing the larger 'head' bead that marks the *mala*'s 'end' and 'beginning'. For years I had looked for a suitable bead in shops and temples and could never find one the right colour brown or the right size compared to the beads of Babaji's *mala*.

This bead so resembled my beads as if they had been on the same thread and worn by the same fingers in prayer, and now were simply being reunited. A mysterious night of wonder. I pressed the beads into my palm flushed with gratitude for Malangdas Maharaj's great blessing. May I be worthy of it.

February 15th, 1987

At the end of the *Yug*, everyone was preparing to leave. I wanted to stay on, to enjoy the sanctity of my room at the top of the temple roof. So I delayed and delayed leaving until the last possible hour to make the bus and plane connections to reach Kathmandu by Monday morning.

Finally, on Saturday afternoon, it was really time to go. We all took the traditional afternoon rest. Then Shyam Sunder and his nephew prepared to accompany me at least up to Jhansi and on by train to Gwalior.

Still I dragged my feet. Soon it was 3 o'clock, then 4 o'clock. After paying our respects to Raja Baba and leaving the temple grounds we came to the edge of the compound when I noticed him. It was the driver, thinner than I'd remembered him, unshaven and unkempt, but unmistakable, the man who had assassinated Baba.

Just as quickly as he had appeared, he vanished out the gate and into the crowd at the bus station. Approaching us was Raja Baba carrying a brick above

his right shoulder as if ready to aim. He was visibly distressed. We pacified him as best we could. Shyam Sunder and I took leave again in a ramshackle 'tonga'. In the anxiety of the moment, Raja Baba could scarcely attend to our departure.

We discussed what should be done. I felt it would be wrong to abandon Raja Baba at such a tense time though we knew he would not be harmed since everyone had been alerted. Shyam Sunder decided to call in at the police station on the way to the bus terminal.

We proceeded slowly with our bony, haggard-looking horse labouring along the perimeter road to the police station. We both disembarked. I had long since missed my bus but felt I should not have left Raja Baba. I had to go back.

Alone, I took a shortcut to Ram Bagh on the footpaths. By the time I returned, a sense of peace had been restored. Raja Baba and I sat at the *dhuni* joined by a group of close devotees. He reflected on his outburst as we recalled what had happened. The driver's never reappeared and everyone felt relieved.

We were cooled by the evening prayers, the fresh night air and Sri Kappali Babaji's teaching. He always used to say: "*The path is full of thorns.*" But I know that it's the best path for me, the only way to be free from this suffering world.



Photo: Sri Kappali Baba's great grandsons, Jutindra in blue

इरी लवता

10. BHIKKHUNI VISION

Sati Saraniya Kuti
Paekakariki, New Zealand

May 15th 2005

I dreamed I saw Babaji, a meeting that was to be a final *darshan*
And so, a sad day for me.
But it was a chance to bow at his feet,
And my Father (who had died in 2001) was with me.
We were to do this together – such are dreams. . .
And as we began to enter the dhuni where Baba sat -
I awoke.

May 16th 2005

Last night I had another dream.
I had a large box of wooden matches.
I was trying to light something –
A candle?
And the matches would not work -
I kept trying one after another - without success.

Finally a match caught
but I dropped it as I brought it to the wick.

But it was already out of control.
I grabbed the burning box and began to run to the door
holding the burning bundle in my hand –
I could not put it down for fear it would cause a fire
in the whole building – a synagogue.

But it was too hot to hold
And though I was running as fast as I could
The door was too far to reach
And I could see that my hand would be burned. I knew this.
Then I awoke.

The first was the sign of authority from my two Fathers –
Permitting me to depart
To take my new name
And embrace my spiritual authority.
To walk independently
Not belonging to any temple
But nevertheless – and none the less – fully on the Path,
And fully legitimate as an ambassador of Truth.

But to accomplish this
I have yet to break free completely

Of the last strings.
These are the financial supports
And identity with the monastery here and in UK.

I must risk walking alone
As Baba's daughter.
Will he not guide me and bless me?

The synagogue is the temple of my birth.
It symbolizes physical birth – hence the presence also of my Father
In the dream
And my spiritual birth, hence Babaji and my Father coming to meet him.
Therefore also the ordained moments...
Investiture into Buddhist ecclesiastic community.
Endowing legitimacy and credibility
Through established forms.

Standing in the shelter - and the confine -
Of that two-faceted image: the synagogue or temple
Wherein I perform the appointed ritual
To light a candle –
I find myself unable
Struggling
And suddenly starting a fire.

I have to run out of the establishment – physically – to save it
As well as myself.
To escape – lest I be burned, destroyed.
And already, I am in grave danger.

The dream stops there –
For it is not necessary to know more.
I must know only this for now.

That to truly complete the ritual
And sanctify my life
I shall have to make a very bold step.

I have to risk abandoning

What is known and feels safe
To face danger
And possibly be burnt as I rush through the door –
But I must go anyway –
Trusting that – for me at least –
It is the way to safety.

And what has been for me a fire on the inside
Will be a light on the outside.
What has been confining and stable
Will appear like an interim step
To be left behind as I progress
Just as one leaves each rung of a ladder
To move to the top.

Not wanting the heights of approval
But rather the health and authenticity
Of liberating movement
The beauty of the heart's release – and
The simple joy of being
Absolutely true to myself.

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CONCISE GLOSSARY for 'A Lion Never Weeps'

Atma(n): The highest or true self (which means disappearance of the self in absorption with the Ultimate) as distinct from the consciousness or ego. Atmadarshan - vision of the Real. Used in the Upanishads to mean 'breath', 'soul' or 'vital principle'; as a cosmological principle: 'universal soul' or 'universal spirit'. Sometimes it refers to a personal creator of the universe, the 'One without a second' – and fully present in each of us.

Darshan: Vision. Direct experience of spiritual energies and forces. A glimpse, a holy meeting such as darshan of a great sage or one's guru.

Dhuni: The sacred fire or place where Baba sat and slept, keeping a fire perpetually burning. According to tradition, he tended it day and night, sitting beside it and looking at the fire, deeply absorbed in himself. Fire manifests the cosmic energy or 'chittagni' (lit. mental fire) which makes up the universe. The dhuni symbolizes this energy, the cosmic consciousness that contains the projection of the entire creation. Its perpetual fire sacrifice is a metaphor of all misdeeds being burnt to ashes - thus the purification of all who seek complete refuge in Truth.

Baba distributed 'vibhuti', sacred ash, from the 'dhuni'. The code of conduct around the 'dhuni' is quite strict. One is not allowed to sit with legs akimbo, to use coarse language, or speak in loud tones.

Traditionally, upon entering and leaving the gadi sacred seat area, one bows toward the incumbent teacher or to the dhuni itself as if a holy sage were seated there, even if one is not actually present in the room.

Dhyana: Meditation. Consciousness without thought, using an mental image, the breath or other object to focus on for the meditation.

Ganesh: The god of prosperity and wisdom. Ganesh has the head of an elephant. Siva and Parvati are his parents. He is the eldest of Lord Siva's two sons (Kartikkeya the other).

Guru: Literally, one who brings light into the darkness, hence the Dispeller of Ignorance. A guide. A realized preceptor who can guide the sincere. The living representative of a philosophical or religious system. There is no difference between realized Guide, Goddess and God.

Hamsa: Swan. A mantra, the natural sound of the breath. It is uttered 21600 times a day.

Hanuman: The monkey god and Lord Rama's eternal servant in the book Ramayana, often painted bright orange. Especially remembered for rescuing Rama's wife, Sita from King Ravana: He is the pinnacle of devotion, or bhakti, and to some is an avatar of Shiva, most popular in northern India.

Kirtan: Song and dance of worshippers of Vishnu or his incarnations. Usually based on Indian

ragas and tala rhythmic patterns using harmonium and tabla, sung in a group comprising

devotees with a lead singer. Bhajans performed during kirtan gatherings have great popular appeal, The constant repetition of names of the Gods, anecdotes of the deities lives, descriptions of divine qualities and praise and prayer delivered in lilting, easily flowing and colloquial renderings of the tunes have a mesmerising effect and thus are a valuable antidote to stress. They also serve to bring the participants to states of ecstasy associated with intense mental concentration, focus and relaxation. Famous writers of *bhajan* or hymn verses include Tulsida, Surdas, Meerabhai and Kabir.

Kleshas: (Sanskrit version, in Pāli - kilesas) according to Raja Yoga teachings of Patanjali, Avidya (ignorance), Asmita (egoism), Raga-Dvesha (likes and dislikes), Abhinivesha (clinging to mundane life) are the five Kleshas or afflictions. repeat There are five dealt with in Nath literature: Ignorance, Ego (an imaginary opinion of ourselves), Repulsion (to overcome it. This means learning that nothing is horrible in itself, Attachment (the false idea that we possess anything), and Clinging to Life. (Pali version 'kilesa' is defilement of mind)

Krishna: In Vaishnava Hindu thinking, Krishna is the supreme personality of the godhead and all other gods, and living entities are his servants. He is unborn and eternal; usually pictured as black, in a dancing posture, and playing a flute. He is the speaker of the Bhagavad-gita, the Bible of Indian philosophy.

Moksha: Ultimate spiritual liberation from material bondage. One of the 4 duties of a human being along with Dharma, Artha and Kama.

Mounam: Silence. To 'take mounam' means to take a vow of silence.

Samādhi: (Sanskrit version) a superconscious state arrived at through complete contemplation, union of the mind and 'soul' attained with transcendent understanding that can bring samarasa and samadrishti or 'equal vision', seeing all things as equal. Samarasa means the yogi(ni) sees himself (herself) as the world and the world as being in himself (herself). Perfect assimilation within oneself. Equipoise in feelings. Mind at rest. Destroy these afflictions. You will attain Samādhi.

Samādhi is of two kinds-Savikalpa, Samprajnata or Sabija, and Nirvikalpa or Asamprajnata or Nirbija.

In Savikalpa or Sabija, there is Triputi or the triad (knower, known and knowledge). The Samskaras (*sankharas*) are not burnt or fried. Savitarka, Nirvitarka, Savichara, Nirvichara, Sasmita and Saananda are the different forms of Savikalpa Samādhi.

In Nirbija Samādhi or Asamprajnata Samādhi there is no triad. The impressions are fried completely. A Bhakta gets Bhava-Samādhi, a Jnani gets Badha-Samādhi, a Raja Yogi gets Nirodha Samādhi.

Samsāra: (Sanskrit) Wheel or ocean of life and death. Wheel of time. Combinations of Shiva's 3 Shaktis or powers which create diversity in the cosmos.

Shiva: Lord of Destruction. Represents pure consciousness. Possesses 3 Shaktis or Powers: Iccha (Will), Jnana (Knowledge), and Kriya (Doing).

Shloka: A short verse as found in the scriptures.

Vibhuti: Ash from the dhuni, sacred and blessed, a tool for spiritual aspirants. Baba distributed 'vibhuti' from the 'dhuni' to all who came to Him with faith, as a token of His grace. It is considered a boon from the Guru to help erase or ease bad karma and create internally conducive factors, such as faith, devotion and energy for self-realisation and progress in one's spiritual practice. Since ancient times it has also been used for its curative powers. The ash can be placed in the middle of the forehead, on the chakras, throat, top of the head, on wounds or other parts of the body, or ingested by mouth.

